LOCAL NEGOTIATION OF GLOBALISED EDUCATIONAL DISCOURSES:
THE CASE OF CHILD FRIENDLY SCHOOLS IN RURAL CAMBODIA

by

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Abstract

Despite massive donor aid to the education sector over the past two decades, school achievement in Cambodia remains poor. Key challenges include low survival rates, limited contact hours, poor literacy skills, and gender disparity. The question of why basic education continues to fail Cambodian children catalysed this research.

This feminist postcolonial inquiry analysed the interface between the global and the local as expressed in Child Friendly Schools (CFS) policy to understand how local Cambodian communities negotiate hegemonic transnational influences. It explored how schools and communities understand and implement CFS on their own terms and how concurrent global discourse about gender equality has impacted gendered identities and relations.

This “vertical case study” shows how exogenous influences are mediated through local perspectives. At least seven critical elements of the Cambodian socio-cultural milieu (worldview, protracted conflict, educational history, political system, poverty, gender perspectives, educational philosophy) converge to shape micro- (school, village) and meso-level (national) response to macro-level (global) influences. While numerous international norms have been institutionalised as policy, many have not been internalised. Local response to global educational discourses takes five forms: deployment, incorporation, adaptation, contestation, and resistance. In some cases, the response is wilful and deliberately negotiated. In other cases it may reflexively arise from conflicting values; witness, for instance, traditional perspectives on gender and gender equality. While homogenisation of basic education clearly occurs at the rhetorical level, hybridity characterises actual implementation. Cambodia’s negotiation of international norms has resulted in poor quality education; much educational reform has been in form rather than in substance.
Study findings show that gender norms, as expressed in school-related texts and relationships, have not been significantly influenced toward gender equality. Rather, the male-centric status quo is supported through teacher attitudes, textbook content, the neutering of gender mainstreaming processes, and the defining of equality in essentially economic terms.

A more coherent and contextualised (and therefore relevant and vernacular) version of elementary education can be achieved by applying a social justice frame which necessarily includes dialogue around cultural values. For policy sharing to succeed, senders and recipients alike must attend seriously to local context, particularly how worldview mediates practice.
Preface

Because this study involved human beings, this study required approval from The University of British Columbia Behavioural Ethics Research Board (UBC - BREB).

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<td>Cambodian Human Rights and Development Association</td>
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<td>ACC</td>
<td>Accreditation Committee of Cambodia</td>
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<td>ACE</td>
<td>Australian Center for Education</td>
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<td>ACT</td>
<td>ASEAN Council of Teachers</td>
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<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of South East Asian Nations</td>
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<td>BNA</td>
<td>Basic Needs Approach</td>
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<td>BREB</td>
<td>Behavioural Research Ethics Board</td>
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<td>CA</td>
<td>Capabilities Approach</td>
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<td>Cooperation Committee for Cambodia</td>
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<td>Council for the Development of Cambodia</td>
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<td>CDCF</td>
<td>Cambodia Development Cooperation Forum</td>
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<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention to End all forms of Discrimination Against Women</td>
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<td>Cambodian Education Sector Support Project,</td>
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<td>CG</td>
<td>Consultative Group</td>
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<td>CGDK</td>
<td>Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea</td>
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<td>CHC</td>
<td>Confucian Heritage Culture/s</td>
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<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
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<td>CITF</td>
<td>Cambodian Independent Teacher’s Federation</td>
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<td>CL</td>
<td>Collective Learning</td>
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<td>CMAC</td>
<td>Cambodia Mine Action Clearance</td>
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<td>C-MDG</td>
<td>Cambodia Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<td>CNCC</td>
<td>Cambodian National Council for Children</td>
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<td>CPP</td>
<td>Cambodian Peoples Party</td>
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<td>CRC</td>
<td>Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN)</td>
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<td>Cambodian Rehabilitation and Development Board</td>
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<td>Critical Theory</td>
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<td>DCD</td>
<td>Department of Curriculum Development (MoEYS)</td>
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<td>DOE</td>
<td>District Office of Education (MoEYS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DTMT</td>
<td>District Training and Monitoring Team</td>
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<td>EAPRO</td>
<td>East Asia Pacific Regional Office (UNICEF)</td>
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<td>Education for All Committee</td>
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<td>ELDS</td>
<td>Early Learning Development Standards</td>
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<td>EMIS</td>
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EQIP  Education Quality Improvement Project
ERC  Education Resources Center
ES  Employability Skills
ESD  Education for Sustainable Development
ESP  Education Strategic Plan
ESSP  Education Sector Support Program
ESWG  Education Sector Working Group
EU  European Union
FAO  Food and Agriculture Organisation (UN)
FGD  Focus Group Discussion
FIACS  Flandev’s Interaction Analysis Categories System
FIDH  International Federation for Human Rights
FTI  Fast-Track Initiative
FUNCINPEC  *Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendent, Neutre, Pacifique, et Coopératif* (National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia: known alternatively as the Royalist party)
GAD-C  Gender and Development – Cambodia (an NGO)
GDI  Gender-related Development Index
GEM  Gender Empowerment Measure
GER  Gross Enrolment Ratio
GII  Gender Inequality Index
GIZ  *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (the German government’s international aid agency)
GMS  Greater Mekong Sub-region
GNI  Gross National Income
GPI  Gender Parity Index
HCEP  Highland Children’s Education Project (CARE International)
HDI  Human Development Index
HKI  Helen Keller International (INGO)
HRBA  Human Rights-based Approach
ICCa  International Cooperation Cambodia (INGO)
ICCb  International Criminal Court
ICHA  Interdepartmental Committee for HIV/AIDS
ICT  Information and Communication Technology
IDRC  International Development Research Centre
IDS  Institute of Development Studies
IFI  International Financial Institutions
IIEP  International Institute for Educational Planning (UNESCO)
ILO  International Labour Organisation
INGO  International Non-Governmental Organisation
IOM  International Office of Migration
ISO  International Organization for Standardization
IWK  Indigenous Ways of Knowing
JICA  Japan International Cooperation Agency
JTWG  Joint Technical Working Group
KAPE  Kampuchea Action for Primary Education
KPNLF  Khmer People’s New Liberation Front
KR   Khmer Rouge
LCD  Liquid Crystal Display (type of projector)
LFA  Logical Framework Analysis
LIC  Low Income Country
LICADHO  Cambodia League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights
LLS  Local Life Skills
LNGO  Local Non-governmental Organisation
LS  Life Skills
LSS  Lower Secondary School
MDG  Millennium Development Goals
MoEYS  Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport
MoH  Ministry of Health
MoSVY  Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans, and Youth
MoWA  Ministry of Women’s Affairs
MICS  Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
NAFTA  North American Free Trade Agreement
NAR  Net Attendance Rate
NATO  North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NEP  NGO Education Partnership
NER  Net Enrolment Rate
NES  National Education Seminar
NGO  Non-Governmental Organisation
NIE  New Institutional Economics
NIE  National Institute of Education (MoEYS)
NIEO  New International Economic Order
NPM  New Public Management
NPRS  National Poverty Reduction Strategy
NTFP  Non-Timber Forest Products (LNGO)
NSDP  National Strategic Development Plan
NWEC  National Women’s Education Centre
OECD  Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OHCHR  Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PAP  Priority Action Plan
PB  Priority Budget
PDR People’s Democratic Republic (Lao)
PISA  Programme for International Student Assessment
POE  Provincial Office of Education (MoEYS)
PRD  Pedagogical Research Department (MoEYS)
PRK  People’s Republic of Kampuchea
PTR  Pupil-teacher Ratio
PTSD  Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
PTTC  Provincial Teacher Training Centre
PWC  Post-Washington Consensus
RA  Research Assistant
RA1  Primary research assistant
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>UNIFEM</td>
<td>United Nations Development Fund for Women</td>
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<td>UNTAC</td>
<td>UN Transitional Authority of Cambodia</td>
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<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>USD</td>
<td>United States dollar (currency designation)</td>
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<td>USS</td>
<td>Upper secondary school</td>
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<td>VOD</td>
<td>Vocational Orientation Department (MoEYS)</td>
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<td>VSO</td>
<td>Voluntary Service Overseas (UK)</td>
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<td>VVOB</td>
<td>Flemish Association for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance</td>
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<td>WB</td>
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Dedication

To my mother LaDonna Rose Reimer, who started back to university for her bachelor’s degree at about the same age I am completing my doctorate (and who then proceeded to earn a second bachelor’s and a master’s degree!), I dedicate this to you because you inspire me by your own life hard-fought and well-lived, to be who I truly am, to recognise and use the gifts I have been given, and to always be moving higher up and deeper in. I am eternally grateful for your unwavering belief in me, for your unceasing prayers on my behalf, for your steady encouragement, and for your wise counsel on innumerable occasions.

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By God’s grace, Soli Deo gloria
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Cambodia has long been a recipient of outside political influence. Over the past six decades, 1950 until the present, Cambodia has been subjected to an extreme array of external political influences under seven official forms of government: protectorate/colony, monarchy, socialism, Republic, two radically divergent versions of Communism, and liberal democracy. Each political system has modified the education system to meet its ideological ends; decades of protracted internecine conflict and war have also had their toll on the nation’s education system; and Cambodia’s particular socio-cultural frame has also left an indelible mark. The legacy of these factors for education in Cambodia today is a system under-financed by the national government, one characterised by insufficient physical infrastructure, limited human capacity, and generally poor quality as evidenced by student achievement and drop-out rates.

Under a liberal democratic structure for the past two decades, the education system in post-conflict Cambodia has been strongly influenced by Western aid in the form of multilateral grants and loans (primarily from World Bank (WB), Asia Development Bank (ADB), and United Nations agencies (UN)), as well as bilateral resources most often channelled through international or local non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Key education reforms since 1998, many initiated by the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) with significant influence from multilateral agencies, have included: decentralisation/deconcentration, pedagogical reform (shifting to “student-centred learning” or SCL), various pro-poor initiatives (such as abolition of school fees, scholarships, village-based remediation programs, and school breakfast programs in poor areas), Education for All (EFA), cluster-schools, Child Friendly Schools (CFS), and early childhood education (ECE). Other reforms include International Labour Organisation (ILO) sponsored child-labour initiatives, mother-tongue education for
indigenous ethnic minorities, OPTIONS (using education to combat child trafficking), and standardised testing (Bredenberg & Sao, 2003; Bunlay et al., 2010; Keng & Clayton, 2007; Kitamura, 2008; Tan, 2007; Turner, 2002).

Despite enormous amounts of Western foreign aid over the past two decades, and multiple interventions by numerous donors, the quality of basic education in Cambodia remains low. A World Bank study (2006b) on school achievement found that “overall, knowledge of the Grade 3 curriculum is low. In Khmer [language] on average 40.4% of 53 multiple choice questions were answered correctly, and in mathematics, on average 37.5% of the responses to 80 questions were correct” (cited in Bernard, 2008, p. 84). From 1991 to 2000, the focus of educational development was still primarily quantitative; that is, on re-establishing educational infrastructure (including human resources) and getting children into school. In 2000 the focus in Cambodia, as in many low-income countries (LICs), began shifting toward quality partly as a result of internationally-driven conversation around Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Four core challenges continue to plague Cambodian education: low survival rates, poor mastery over basic literacy and numeracy skills, limited critical thinking (Bernard, 2008), and gender disparity in favour of males, strongly correlated with ascending education levels (Lall, 2008).

To address the issue of educational quality, the Child Friendly Schools approach was introduced to Cambodia through the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in its 1996-2000 Development Plan. From 2001-2004, UNICEF and the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) funded a CFS pilot implemented by a local non-governmental

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1 In this dissertation the term “low-income country” or LIC is used as per the World Bank definition. The WB classifies national economies according to GNI (gross national income) per capita, which it calculates using the World Bank Atlas method. According to this classification, a low income country is one in which the per capita GNI is (USD) $975 or less. See http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-classifications.
organisation (LNGO) called Kampuchea Action for Primary Education (KAPE). Simultaneously, Save the Children Norway (SCN) engaged in an independently financed parallel implementation of the concept. Based on the positive results of the KAPE initiative, in 2007 the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport (MoEYS) adopted Child Friendly Schools as a national model for the purpose of delivering quality education.

An important rationale for using the CFS approach was to “demonstrate practical applications of a child rights-based approach to development that would operationalise Cambodia’s adherence to the [UN-Convention on the Rights of the Child – UN-CRC]....also...to [go beyond] minimalist expectations for basic literacy and numeracy, leading to a strong focus on critical and creative thinking” (KAPE, 2007a, p. 1). CFS as an approach to education is premised on constructivism, a theory of knowledge (not a particular pedagogy) arguing that humans generate knowledge and meaning from interaction between ideas and real experiences. The third distinctive of CFS is that it is student-centred, foregrounding individual knowledge and potential. Fourth, CFS is heavily reliant on cooperative learning principles (KAPE, 2007a).

The few evaluations that have been conducted suggest a sub-optimal uptake of the CFS concept as evidenced in limited implementation (Bernard, 2008; Courtney, 2008; Duthilleul, 2005). Combined with low student achievement, limited conceptual appreciation by implementers has resulted in a discourse of “low capacity” levelled by the international community and central-level MoEYS authorities (with the attendant solution of “more training”). The RGC’s response has been to assign fault for poor educational performance to three additional popular discourses: poverty, destruction (wrought by the Khmer Rouge regime), and “Cambodian culture.”
Such inquiry has only been from the perspective of the foreign (non-Cambodian) organisations that introduced CFS; it therefore seeks to identify and then rectify any deviance from its stated ideal. Though many stakeholders were certainly consulted, the views of village-level stakeholders have never been central to analysis and conclusions. As a result, a major recommendation of such studies tends to be related to “additional training.” In contrast this study sought to bring to the centre of analysis, key stakeholder perspectives: that is, to outline what is the local appreciation and understanding of teachers, administrators, students, and parents about the formal educational enterprise at large, and specifically, globalised educational discourse in the form of the Child Friendly School concept.

**Interface Between the Global and the Local**

The connections between “global” and “local” ideas and norms have long been observed and pondered by international and comparative educationalists that, by definition, compare and contrast how education is enacted in various parts of the world. A major theme in comparative education is how and which policy and pedagogical influences migrate and are taken up, modified, rejected and with what results. Much attention has been paid to bilateral policy-level transfers, much less to village-level enactment. With the recent pace of globalisation, and the ensuing homogenisation of the practice of mass formal education (though not necessarily educational achievement) across immensely varied countries and cultures, the need to describe, understand, and analyse local educational practices becomes more urgent.

Focusing on “the local” in light of “the global” also requires an understanding of the influence of intermediate geo-political spaces through which [global] discursive themes are mediated, that is, “the regional.” In Cambodia’s case, this demands acknowledgement of the
complex influence of individual neighbouring countries with whom Cambodia has long shared historic animosity and land-claims (Vietnam and Thailand), but to whom it also owes gratitude for halting the murderous Khmer Rouge era (Vietnam) and with whom it shares not a little religious, cultural, and linguistic affiliation (Thailand). Another actor is the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), a regional alliance with increasingly strong influence on its ten member nations (Cambodia joined in 1999) toward economic and social integration, and a recent push in the direction of common educational standards. With assistance from the Asian Development Bank, the six nations along the Mekong River have formed the Great Mekong Sub-region\(^2\) (GMS), described by ADB (2012) as “a natural economic area bound together by the Mekong River, covering 2.6 million square kilometres and a combined population of around 326 million” (ADB, 2012). More distant but still regional, the nations of Japan, Korea, and China also wield significant political and economic influence on Cambodia through a more subtle combination of economic and political incentives which largely escapes media attention and academic analysis.

The overall aim of this inquiry, then, was to analyse the interface between global norms and themes, including regional influences, and “the local” as expressed in one specific contextual enactment of formal education. That is, to understand how local communities (comprised of students, parents, teachers, school administrators) (re)interpret and (re)negotiate transnational influences on primary education. Specifically, the research explores the extent to which “local” concepts, vernacular versions of pedagogy and knowledge(s), are evident (or absent) in the enactment of Cambodian primary schooling as represented by implementation of one particular educational policy (Child Friendly Schools), an educational approach promoted

\(^2\) The GMS countries are Cambodia, the People's Republic of China (PRC, specifically Yunnan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region), Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam.
by multilateral and international non-governmental agencies and now institutionalised by the Cambodian Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport.

**The Research Problem**

Historically, formal education in Cambodia has been strongly influenced by religion (Buddhism), colonizing (foreign) powers, and overtly political agendas. Successive regimes intentionally employed “education” as a means for legitimizing power and producing a populace equipped to contribute to particular aims and imagined futures (Ayers, 2003). Scholars identify at least ten major epochs in the history of formalised education in Cambodia, distinguishable by political terms and priorities, as well as by educational policy and practice (Ayers, 2003; Clayton, 1999; Duggan, 1996; Slocomb, 2006). The fact that many nations and competing political ideologies have stamped their influence on Cambodia within a relatively short period of time has led to its depiction as “a culture under siege” (Fergusson & Le Masson, 1997).

Though not commonly recognised as such, the most recent exogenous actor on the Cambodian education stage is globalisation, in the form of international development and particularly educational multilateralism promoting a strongly neoliberal agenda (King, 2007; Klees, 2008; Mundy, 2007; Rizvi, Engel, Nandyala, Rutkowski, & Sparks, 2005). As noted above, key education reforms since 1998, promoted by the global aid community and enthusiastically taken up by MoEYS include: decentralisation/deconcentration, teacher training, Education for All, cluster-schools, the CFS initiative, early childhood education, education to combat child trafficking, child-labour initiatives, mother-tongue education for indigenous ethnic minorities, various pro-poor initiatives, economic strengthening, standardised testing, multi-grade classroom teaching, and inclusive education (Bredenberg &
Many of these policy moves have an obvious attachment to both the basic human needs agenda and a human rights discourse. However, an overarching neoliberal influence in globalisation is evident as well. This is visible in the deliberate focus on access (which can be understood as a means of promulgating order and stability (Springer, 2010)), focus on basic education (and neglect of public versions of secondary school and higher education), neglect of the quality imperative, the move toward a vocational training emphasis at lower secondary level, and policies which strongly emphasise efficiency and effectiveness. Devolving management and basic funding responsibility to communities and actively tolerating payment of informal school fees are two more examples. Another example of the influence of a neoliberal agenda is the marketisation of education in the guise of fostering public-private education partnerships, an ostensibly benign move which effectively promotes an inequitably tiered education system.

A word of caution is necessary here in discussion about neoliberalism, characterised by some as “the new academic bogeyman” (Thavat, 2010):

[Neoliberalism is]…yet another catchall phrase that appears to say everything but nothing…. It is shorthand for a particular type of institutional arrangement that seeks to relinquish economic control from the public sector to the private….a handy, off the rack, explanation that appears to be ‘one size fits all’ (Thavat, 2010).

Indeed, neoliberalism is a popular target for academics concerned about the demise of education in a globalis(ed)ing world (Apple, 2000; Burbules & Torres, 2000; Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; Klees, 2008; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Rutkowski, 2007). However, as Springer (2011) cogently notes, rather than being crassly defined as a “singular and fully realized policy
regime, ideological form, or regulatory framework,” neoliberalism is rather more fruitfully conceptualised as contextually articulated (p. 2554). Thus, it necessarily has unique manifestations that are context dependent, recipients that are more or less obliging, and forms that differ from place to place. Nuanced appreciation of the forms internationalised ideals take when locally implemented is largely missing in the extant English-language literature on education in low-income countries.

Despite surging interest and vast resourcing, results of educational reforms in Cambodia over the past decade are generally poor (Marshall et al., 2009). For example, net enrolment rates in primary school have increased from 77.8 percent in 1997-98 to roughly 83 percent in 2000-01 and 94.8 percent in 2009-10; and almost all children who enrol in primary school now make it to grade three (UNESCO/IBE, 2011). However, Cambodia has some of the highest grade repetition rates in the region (UNESCO, 2007). Moreover, survival rates to grade six still lag, as UNESCO (2010a, p. 23) estimates that only about 52.5 percent of first graders reach grade six. Roughly three-quarters of the grade three students and one-quarter of grade six students were classified as “non-proficient” in math and Khmer (Marshall, 2004). Furthermore, girls still trail boys. In secondary school the gender gap is particularly wide, with about 30 percent of boys and just 10 percent of eligible girls (of secondary school-age) enrolled (UNICEF, 2007c). That is, the gross enrolment ratio for females in Cambodia at primary level is 115, dropping to 36 percent in secondary level, and a mere four percent in tertiary education (for a female to male ratio at tertiary level of 0.46) (UNESCO, 2010).

What then, is the problem of educational development? Why are Cambodian children still faring poorly at attaining even basic knowledge and skills? Why do so few girls complete 12 years of school? In this dissertation I contend that at least part of the answer to this critical
question is contingent upon how the problem is defined and what questions are being posed, as well as whose voices are being heard and whose are silenced. Most development research in Low Income Countries, and certainly in Cambodia to date, has addressed educational systems from an economistic, efficiency orientation. It tends to see key players (administrators, teachers, students, families of students) as objects rather than as subjects and viable participants. Individual voices, largely regarded as add-ons, are often neutralised in the amalgamation of words with numbers and the aggregation of data from multiple countries. Education-related research supported by multilateral and bilateral donors tends to be quantitative and employs positivist norms about empirical research processes, as well as Western pedagogical preferences as key reference points. Apart from consistently noting that fewer females than males attend school, are in school leadership, run Ministries of Education, etc., such research does not seriously attend to perspectives from women and girls—perhaps precisely because females tend to be absent from positions of formal power or authority.

Such mainstream approaches to research are increasingly contested by comparative educationists who are pushing for more detailed, grass-roots, and relationally-oriented exploration of the interface among global, national, and local actors (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Cowen, 2006; Crossley, 2000; Johnson, 2006; Schweisfurth & Crossley, 2009). Steiner-Khamsi (2006) notes that “too often policy transfer is framed in terms of coercion and imposition with little critical analysis of how and why decision-makers actively borrow reforms” (p. 676). To avoid making that assumption and address these research gaps, I employ a postcolonial feminist perspective to analyse the interface between the global and the local, and the extent to which “local” concepts, i.e. vernacular versions of pedagogy and knowledge(s), are evident in the enactment of Cambodian schooling. This intentionally
qualitative research makes central the voices of policy recipients and end-users rather than policy-makers and policy-borrowers. It juxtaposes international norms against Cambodian reality, rather than measuring Cambodia against international standards. And it seeks to privilege the voices of women and girls.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand how local educators and communities negotiate transnational influences on education promoted by multilateral agencies in Cambodia. A secondary aim is to assess the influence of global discourses about gender, specifically though not only related to the education sector, on gendered identities and relations. This study is not intended to evaluate how well teachers or schools are implementing Child Friendly Schools; nor is it a critique of CFS *per se*. Rather, it is an exploration of how schools and communities actually understand and implement CFS, and the concept of gender (equality) as it relates to education, on their own terms. Though generalisability is limited by the fact that this is a case study, this research does have the ambition to illuminate a larger set of cases (Allden, 2009, p. 35). Research findings can be usefully applied within the education sector in Cambodia at all levels, beyond the formal primary level to non-formal and higher education. Findings are also applicable for other post-conflict situations, not only in Southeast Asia, but more broadly.

For the purpose of this research, “local communities” is defined as one particular village and School Cluster, and the students, parents/primary caregivers, teachers, and educational administrators who inhabit that space. “Negotiate” refers to how local communities interact with the foreign norms/ideas, and was therefore defined as broadly as possible to include notions of perceiving, understanding, deploying, incorporating, enacting,
appropriating, contesting, resisting, and ignoring. To provide focus to the research, I looked specifically at globalised educational ideals as expressed in terms of one particular education policy (CFS), and also globalised discourse about gender as it relates to education in Cambodia. I also limited interaction to stakeholders associated with Grades 4-6 (rather than Grades 1-6, which officially constitutes “primary education” in Cambodia).

Both Child Friendly Schools and gender equality are “international norms” (Allden, 2009) that have been intentionally introduced to Cambodia by the international development community (multilateral, bilateral, and non-governmental organisations). The concept of gender equality, and an emphasis on participation of women in the public political sphere as well as development projects, arrived long before CFS. Attention to “gender”, then, will necessarily require exploration of various instruments and policies beyond, and within, the education sector.

**Research questions**

As noted, a substantial body of literature addresses the influence of globalisation on education at policy level for developing nations, but there is relatively little investigation of grassroots (local) perceptions and mediation of that influence. Thus, the focus of this doctoral research is upon village-level negotiation of exogenous (modernist, “foreign”) education models and ideal by those directly accessing education (children, parents) and by those who perform educative functions (teachers, school administrators, MoEYS). It pays particular attention to the notion of “gender equality” and how international emphasis on this particular concept impacts (transforms?) gendered identities and relations of the educational stakeholders who participated. The research aimed to describe the nature and extent of “local” (Khmer) ideas, activities, epistemologies within Cambodian basic education policy and practice; and
investigated what influence the presence/absence of a local perspective might have.

Specifically, this study addresses two research questions:

1) How do local communities in rural Cambodia negotiate globalised educational discourses in primary education? What is the grassroots response to international models and philosophies of education?

2) To what extent does globalised educational discourse about primary education promote transformations in gender identities and relations?

**Research significance**

This research responds to the need for careful examination of linkages and interaction between global, national, and local actors in mediating education: the need for close observation of how educators in low-income countries respond to various aspects of globalization (Monkman & Baird, 2002) and “how they deal with curricular and pedagogical dilemmas and face the challenges of equity in the global environment” (Liu & Fang, 2009, p. 408). It also aims to broaden thinking and theorizing about the nature and effects of globalisation on formal education within the context of developing countries, and more specifically, to post-conflict and transitional situations.

This inquiry attempts to reframe education-related analysis and conversation in Cambodia to include a consideration of power relations, ideology, and identity as well as fundamental cultural issues and the perspective of the primary consumers of education (parents, children-as-students). Hopefully, this focus and the recommendations will positively influence the way that planners and educators envision ends and means, thereby allowing more strategic utilisation of the significant financial resources already channelled into practical aspects of formal education delivery. This research also aims to extend the reach of current academic knowledge about cultural dimensions for enhancement of education in developing nations. In Cambodia, accounting for a Khmer worldview will ideally facilitate learning and
knowledge acquisition, allow utilisation of more appropriate teaching and assessment methods, and may eventually result in more relevant curriculum. These benefits could be experienced by various educational planners and implementers including NGOs, local institutions, as well as the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport.

The research aims to contribute not just through distributing findings but also through the actual inquiry process. Ethnographic research methods informed by a critical feminist perspective took the form of actively involving caregivers and students, as well as teachers, education administrators, policy-makers, and academics in the study. As such, this research provides a model of participatory, respectful, contextually-sensitive inquiry. For instance, at the community level, it promoted participation in educational policy analysis of Child Friendly Schools and provided an example that participants can reference to (independently) analyse other issues. In collaboration and consultation with local people, teachers, administrators, NGOs, government and other policy actors, it also enabled local, regional, national dissemination of the previously unexplored local, grassroots narrative of the Cambodian educational experience.

**Overview of Research Methodology**

This qualitative study employs a feminist postcolonial perspective through critical ethnographical research methods to investigate the “fit” between the philosophy underpinning Child Friendly Schools and actual understanding, practices, and attitudes among Cambodian stakeholders, the “end-users” in the education sector. The ethnographic approach is appropriate for this research because it is holistic (taking into account “all aspects of the phenomenon under study as parts of an interrelated whole” (Padgett, 2008: p. 31)) and embraces cultural relativism (requiring understanding of a culture on its own terms, not through norms applied
from another culture). More specifically, this research used focused ethnography because its purpose was “…primarily to evaluate or to elicit information on a special topic or shared experience” (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 58) in contrast to traditional ethnography which does not pre-identify the research focus before the study commences. Additionally, as the research aimed to promote positive change in behaviour relating to teaching and learning, the methodology included elements of a critical ethnographic approach which “examines cultural knowledge and action with the aim of forcing society to identify and act on values and ethical and political issues” (2007, p. 58). As noted above, it is expected that purposeful inclusion of research participants will enable them to utilise for their own purposes, both the information generated by this particular research, and in future, apply these inquiry methods to other issues.

Rich data was generated at the school level during a 5-month period (one school term) when together with my Research Assistant, I lived in a small rural village with a family that included two teachers employed in the local primary school. Research activities included frequent observation of school life and classroom practice, focus group discussions with a range of stakeholders (including students in Grades 4-6), application of participatory methods such as drawing pictures and prioritising with the Ten Seeds Technique (TST), as well as observation of and participation in the host family’s rural, agrarian lifestyle. Additional information was gathered through in-depth interviews with Khmer and expatriate educators, and officials from the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport. Intentional exploration of Khmer perspectives on teaching and learning (epistemology), as well as attention to language employed (Khmer words and phrases relating to the educational enterprise broadly defined), textual analysis (including proverbs relating to education/learning), review of unpublished NGO reports, and policy and discourse analysis also revealed a wealth of relevant information.
Another valuable source of information was formal and informal discussions with local, regional, and international NGO staff working in a variety of educational settings, as I capitalised on relationships developed in eight years of living and working in Southeast Asia.

The conceptual tools used to understand the dynamics and variables involved in local community and LIC negotiation of global educational (and social, cultural, political, economic) influences were drawn from three research traditions: critical, feminist, and postcolonial. All three are concerned with social justice, especially for research participants. By definition, their analyses move beyond the immediate narratives of research subjects to broader processes and social relations. Each contributed a slightly different emphasis on the research process, questions, and findings. Critical theory demanded the troubling of political and social norms. A feminist perspective demanded transparency and mutuality with respondents in the research process, as well as attention to the identity of knowledge-makers. Postcolonial sensitivities served to question the concept of “universality” and to highlight the possibility of oppression and marginalisation not only by exogenous forces, but also as they are actively carried out by local elites at various social levels.

**Synopsis of Findings**

Research findings demonstrate a wide gap between international educational norms and local educational practice in Cambodia, which results in low educational achievement for students. This underscores the urgent need to recognise cultural differences and take local perspectives seriously in the framing of educational practice in LICs. The implicit assumption that there are universal orthodoxies of education actually holds children hostage to poor pedagogical practices and inhibits their ability to develop basic literacy and other relevant skills.
In fact, at the local level “uptake” or “adoption” is better described as a prolonged process of negotiation as exogenous influences are mediated through particular indigenous realities and perspectives. Indigenous reality directly prescribes the rationale for acceptance of internationally generated policy at the central government level and influences the ability for uptake as well as the willingness and capacity of ground-level practitioners to implement. This research identified seven major elements of indigenous perspective comprising the contemporary socio-cultural milieu that directly influences Cambodia’s uptake of foreign [Western] ideals (expressed as international conventions, policy, etc.). The Cambodia case demonstrates that the imposition of external norms which ignores local values does so at their own peril. The result is an uncomfortable cognitive dissonance for practitioners and dissatisfaction for (foreign) proponents at the stark contrast between externally generated ideals and their local expressions. For students, who are the ultimate focal point of education, the results are most detrimental. Students’ learning potential and academic achievement are hampered, social stratification persists and becomes even more pronounced; indeed life opportunities are restricted rather than enhanced. The study concludes that using a social justice perspective as a policy driver is a potential way forward through largely failed educational reforms based on internationally-driven ideals, to redress the injustice of poor quality education offered to children in public schools in low-income nations.

**Structure of the Dissertation**

This first chapter has provided an overview of the study and a rationale for conducting this research. Chapter Two consists of a review of literature related to globalisation, international development, and gender and education. It charts transnational discourse influences on Cambodian education and gives three specific examples of resistance and
contestation at the national level. In this way, I provide the larger context for the questions addressed in this research. Chapter Three explains the research methodology and philosophical basis of the research. I am a feminist researcher refracting feminist sensibilities through a postcolonial perspective by applying critical ethnographic and participatory research methods. This methodology chapter also addresses methodological challenges particular to qualitative research and to cross-cultural research. It includes a word about the author’s positioning before providing a description of the research site, both geographic and relational. The chapter concludes with detailed information about data collection tools and a framework to explain points of analysis of the implementation of multi-dimensional Child Friendly Schools.

Chapter Four provides an historical overview of the Cambodian context as a backdrop against which to understand contemporary educational practice. It begins with a review of the historical, cultural, and political context that has influenced the contemporary composition and practice of formal education in Cambodia. Next, the chapter details issues and directions of formal education from 1998 to the present, including specific attention to the influence of Cambodia’s geopolitical positioning. It highlights gender and the reality of girls’ [limited] access to education before sketching the current educational landscape in terms of overall achievement, participation statistics, cost, and pedagogical practice. The chapter concludes with identification and description of eight critical issues confronting Cambodia’s education system today. Chapter Five first generally applies the concept of culture to the educational enterprise before describing current academic understandings of a Khmer worldview. Then it takes a look at Cambodia through the lens of several universal cultural schematics before explicitly describing the intersection of the Cambodian worldview with formal education and tentatively suggesting what might be some elements of a Khmer philosophy of education.
Chapters Six through Eight detail the empirical findings of this study: an historical account and subsequent narrative of community and classroom-level perspective, perceptions, and practices of Child Friendly Schools in Cambodia. Chapter Six provides an overview of current theory and practice of CFS in the region and in Cambodia. It positions CFS on the global stage, explains its philosophical base, and recounts how international aid agencies, multilateral and non-governmental introduced CFS to Cambodia. The chapter then paints a detailed picture of administrative systems, structures, and practices in one primary school in rural Cambodia; the section includes a profile of teachers, as they are paramount to education. School administration, including interaction with the community, is described before the chapter ends with a discussion of how local and how “friendly” the current curriculum is.

Chapter Seven details school-level negotiation of CFS by outlining local stakeholder understandings of CFS and painting a portrait of pedagogical practice in the classroom, including methods of student assessment. It discusses the complex issue of discipline and corporal punishment, highlighting teacher ambivalence. This chapter also discusses parental expectation for education, and parental and community involvement in education. The chapter concludes by providing a 5-point frame for understanding local negotiation.

Chapter Eight is dedicated to a discussion of the extent to which globalised educational discourse about primary education has transformed gendered identities and relations in Cambodia. It begins with a summary of Cambodian views of women, both traditional and contemporary. Next it gives a picture of the overarching national policy framework for gender and education. This is followed by explanation of a grassroots perspective on gender, what it looks like in practice as voiced by administrators, teachers, and girl/boy students at the
research site. The chapter concludes with a gender analysis of the text and illustrations in the 12 textbooks used in Grades 4-6, contrasting official perceptions with an analytical rendering.

In Chapter Nine, the study’s empirical findings are applied to an analysis of formal education practice in Cambodia. The chapter begins by discussing the contribution findings make to theory about educational globalisation, gender and education, and postcolonial theory. Next, five contextual challenges are highlighted before recommendations are given about how policy and practice can better consider the local context in the interest of more effective, appropriate, and equitable basic education for Cambodian children. These recommendations can usefully be applied beyond Cambodia to other post-conflict settings and low-income countries which also experience strong influence from the international aid community. This chapter concludes with suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER TWO: EDUCATION IN A GLOBALIS(ed)ING WORLD

Around the world “school” looks very similar, almost irrespective of its physical setting and whether it occurs in high-, middle-, or low-income nations. This is the case with visible aspects such as age-graded classes, facility construction, subject matter, and schedules and also for less tangible aspects such as themes of pedagogical perspectives, policy reform, and financing mechanisms. Theories abound about why this is so. At one end of the explanatory spectrum are world culture theorists who posit that humanity is naturally evolving toward a common best practice. This view, according to Anderson-Levitt (2003), contrasts with world systems theory that suggests similarities are the result of inequitable [economic] power relations which make inevitable the dominance of particular approaches to educational implementation. Differing theories obviously have varying views of the agency of various actors, including nation-states, to determine educational specifics. Indeed, the role of nation-states and their response to external pressures is hotly contested by academics and practitioners alike, not just in relation to education, but also more generally in the economic, social, and political spheres.

It is impossible to understand the local reality of education in Cambodia – or any low-income, post-conflict nation – without careful consideration of the very real influence wrought by the supra-national global nature of life today. To that end, this chapter examines the global context in which mass formal primary education currently occurs, with particular attention to issues that relate directly to education in low-income countries. It begins by describing, rather than defining, “globalisation” and then discussing the complex issue of governance in the hyper-connected world created by globalising processes, before moving on to describe several ways in which the global environment directly affects formal and nonformal education. Next,
major theories of international development are presented with explicit reference to the educational philosophies and models particular to each, and mention of recently emerging conceptualisations of what form/s mass education should take to best equip students to learn. The next section in the chapter is devoted to exploring the parameters of gender and education discourse which has acquired a prominent place on the global stage. The chapter concludes by discussing what form globalised educational discourse in Cambodia takes, and provides three examples of national-level contestation of international themes.

**Defining “Globalisation”**

Globalisation, the “‘big idea of the late twentieth century” (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt & Perraton, 1999), is “shaping a new era of interaction among nations, economies, and people.” This era is characterised by new markets, new tools (especially - quicker and less expensive communication), new actors, and new rules and norms (UNDP, 1999, p. 25). Definitions for this “big idea” abound – globalisation is frequently conflated or confused with internationalisation, liberalisation, universalisation, Westernisation or modernisation, and deterritorialisation (Scholte, 2005).

Often described and understood in strictly economic or material-cultural terms, and sometimes characterised in extremes as either scapegoat or saviour, globalisation is rather more usefully “conceived as a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organisation of social relations and transactions, generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and power” (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt & Perraton, 1999). These interacting processes include “the changes that [flow] from the new information technologies and the opening up of markets, but also new concepts” such as “the social problems of a restless and conflicted world of super-complexity and
constant change” (Power, 2007, p. 88). Rendered more simply, “shrinking space, shrinking
time and disappearing borders are linking peoples’ lives more deeply, more intensely and more
immediately than ever before” (UNDP, 1999, p. 1).

Globalisation’s influence on material culture is very plain for all to see, hear, taste, and
wear. However, the ideological dimensions of globalisation – the way it confers or removes
value and legitimacy from particular modes, products, ideas, thoughts – are more difficult, and
perhaps more important to identify and analyse. Appadurai’s (1996) identification of five
particular “flows” that constitute the contemporary landscape of globalisation (ethno-, media-,
techno-, finance-, and ideo-scapes) is a creative and useful antidote to the economistic
essentialism that dominates characterisation of globalisation. Casting globalisation in these
inclusive and dynamic relational terms makes it “possible to empirically map patterns of
world-wide links and relations across all key domains of human activity, from military to the
cultural” (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt & Perraton, 1999). It is these links and relations that are
the object of focus here, specifically relating to formal education as practiced in low-income
countries.

In addition to the obvious influence on general material culture and (global, regional,
national) governance structures globalisation also directly affects material culture and practices
within educational systems, and the governance of educational institutions. An example of this
is growing reliance on electronic digital resources for delivery of educational services and
content across nations (on-line courses are replacing classroom-based instruction) and within
classrooms (computers and LCD projectors are replacing blackboards; emphasis on breadth of
information rather than depth of knowledge facilitated by access to vast quantities of data).
Computers facilitate standardised testing (and competition generally) not just within, but also
between nations and regions of the world. As for governance of educational institutions, and especially within the higher education sector, globalisation heralds a definite shift toward a market ideology (for the purpose of income-generation), new regulatory structures, and homogenisation of policy instruments (Mok, 2005).

Competing explanations of globalisation differ primarily in conceptualisations of the role of nation-states and the extent/nature of (cross border) inter-connectedness. These theories are reflected, often implicitly, in education literature. Three major theoretical trends are delineated by Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton (1999) as follows. (Hyper)globalists (conservative and radical) see globalisation as inevitable and comprehensive; this deterministic perspective believes the demise of the nation-state is inevitable and nearly complete. Countering this as an observer from an African LIC, Tikly (2001) provides evidence of the implausibility of this view for sub-Saharan Africa, an assessment that applies with equal validity to LICs in Southeast Asia. Tikly points out that national governments still hold primary responsibility for education, and that especially in the postcolonial context, African governments in fact have “strengthened rather than loosened their grip on education systems” (p. 153) as they intentionally use education to forge citizenship.

Alternately, sceptics argue that the intensification of international activity through globalisation actually enhances the power, role, and influence of nation-states but shifts that role to one that is more regulatory and defensive. Transformationalists take a middle road, asserting that while processes of globalisation are clearly altering the role and identity of nation-states, it is impossible to predict the outcome, though obviously politics will not or can no longer be based solely on nation-state relations. This third version seems to most accurately describe the situation in (Asian) low-income nations, where highly publicised assertions of
national sovereignty sit comfortably alongside growing territorial integration, fusion of goods and services on a regional level, and international interference (Wah & Ojendal, 2005).

Major economic features of the current globalised landscape include stark and growing income and opportunity disparity and inequality, not only between, but also within nations, global shifts in forms of employment as the global North outsources manufacturing (and other low-paid) jobs to the global South; and reliance on computerised technology that facilitates capital flow and enables speculating. Key political features of this era are debate about the (ideal) role of the state and the existence of a truly global supra-state infrastructure concerned with various aspects of governance and comprised of agencies, resources, and agreements that are ideologically, legally, and/or morally binding (Rutkowski, 2007). Distinctive cultural features of the current globalising age include an emphasis on identity (visible in the extremes of religious fanaticism and nationalism), as well as unprecedented migration and cultural hybridity (Spring, 2009).

Particular views and experiences of globalisation are, literally and figuratively, influenced by where a person stands (Wah & Ojendal, 2005). As Soudien states, “We face specific kinds of globalisation around the world” (2005, p. 503). Rizvi and Lingard (2010) agree, summarising that the “globalised world is fundamentally heterogeneous, unequal and conflictive, rather than integrated and seamless. It is experienced differently by different communities, and even individuals, and is sustained and created by people and institutions with widely different histories and political interests” (p. 24).

Concerns prioritised by countries that belong to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (e.g. standardisation and accreditation across the nations of the European Union (EU), or “lifelong learning”) differ both in substance and scale
from issues facing LICs, where priority is, in many instances, simply getting young children to school. Cooper (2001) describes the influences of globalisation in Africa as “‘lumpy’ in the extreme…the effects vary very greatly from country to country, from region to region, and from group to group” (cited in O’Brian, 2005, p. 481).

Globalization is being experienced as a discriminatory and even oppressive force in many places and this condition has come to constitute…a ‘puzzle’ for many families, communities and countries having to make decisions about the kind of education their young ought to have….What educational decisions, for example, ought a Zulu-speaking family in South Africa make about their six-year old son who has been brought up on a diet of American television?….How should the state government of Rivers State in Nigeria respond to the demands of subsistence farmers for English schools…? (Soudien, 2005, p. 501)

These variations in the understanding and experience of globalisation’s influence and effects, and concomitant confusion, suggests that it may be more accurate to refer to globalising in the present continuous sense, and to globalisation(s) as plural or multiple, rather than simply as singular and accomplished. In this milieu, everything becomes exponentially complex, including education. People are immensely confused about:

how much or how little of that which we imagine to be distinctly ours, whatever that might be, we wish to have at the core of the education our children ought to receive; or, alternately, how strongly we wish them to be assimilated into that which has become the dominant culture. (Soudien, 2005, p. 502)

In summary, while the dynamics and definition of globalisation are contested, there is no doubt in any theoretical camp that the nations and peoples of this world are more closely and quickly inter-connected economically, technologically, culturally, and politically than at any previous time in human history. Just how this “connectedness” works itself out, what it actually looks like in any sphere, differs significantly depending on location and upon the social and economic capital available to nations, institutions, and to individuals. In the education sector, while some of the most basic questions appear to have changed little over
time (what should be taught to whom, how, by whom, and for what reasons; and how can learning be accomplished). What is vigorously contested now is who, really, answers those questions.

**Governance in a globalised world**

For most people, the nation-state remains a primary reference point in everyday life. Indeed, national governments do make and enforce, to varying degrees, laws and policies for the ostensible well-being of their citizens. Mundane, as well as complex differences in these arenas are clearly visible between countries – take traffic flows and capital punishment for example. However, when considering the nature of national projects and systems such as education (or healthcare or justice), it is useful to distinguish between government and governance. Governance is a much broader concept than government: governance systems are more diffuse than hierarchical, power is typically dispersed and not as centralised; governance is more about generating consensus than enforcing compliance (Hartley, 2003). Governance is less about structure than is government and does not necessarily hold capacity or the right for legal enforceability, concerning itself instead with the “formulation and execution of collective action” (Shah, 2003, p. 1). And “…governance turns the state from being the central, dominating source of authority within a defined territory to being an activator or coordinator in the negotiation of positions which suit a multitude of actors on specific topics over a territory where borders are less obviously fixed” (Meehan, 2003, p. 5).

Since the second World War, a set of supra-national organisations with tremendous resourcing, power, and will to influence, set, and even dominate policy-speak in nearly every facet of social organisation in both the global South and North, has rapidly evolved. This global supra-structure is both a cause and a consequence of globalisation (Stromquist, 2002).
An essentially neoliberal economic perspective that is distrustful of and antagonistic toward state intervention, and which is essentially competitive, individualistic, and instrumentalist undergirds the current version of global governance (Altbach, 2002; Apple, 2000; Carnoy & Rhoten, 2005; Klees, 2008; Rizvi et al., 2005). This clearly has implications for the direction and nature of education, and many other spheres of life. For education, Stromquist & Monkman (2000) observe that the notion of education as a common good is giving way to commoditisation of education; focus in developed nations has shifted from a child-centred curriculum to economic-focused vocational training; teacher autonomy has been reduced; and decisions in school systems are increasingly made by managers and administrators rather than professional educators.

Global (supra-national) networks are organised around different interests, or a combinations of interests, at both regional and global levels. These include trade networks such as International Organisation for Standardization (ISO), World Trade Organisation (WTO), and North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA); aid (UN agencies); and legal and migration issues attended to by the International Criminal Court (ICC\textsuperscript{b}), International Labour Organisation (ILO), and International Office of Migration (IOM)). There are also superstructures coalesced around military issues, for instance the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO); financial issues (World Bank, Asian Development Bank) and education (UN Education, Science, Culture Organisation (UNESCO) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. These networks come together in different formations for particular events such as the World Economic Forum, and also organise in regional blocs, for instance the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the European Union, and the Southern
African Development Community (SADEC), as well as on a multilateral level. Some of the most prominent multilateral agencies belong to the United Nations.

A recent addition to this supra-national set of organisations is the WSF (World Social Forum), which differs from the others in that its constituency is solely comprised of civil society, rather than governmental, members and it is not a formal set of NGOs so much as a venue for NGOs to meet (J. Chan, 2007). Non-governmental organisations too are increasingly vocal at the supra-national level, working together to support or oppose particular issues. Perhaps the strongest and most consistent message these alternative organisations deliver is the need for genuine local participation and greater ecological sensitivity. They serve as the voice of diverse populations, and argue that ordinary people must be heard in matters that affect their lives and the well-being of the planet. Much is being made of the potential these agencies have for envisioning and enacting “another world,” but it is too early to know clearly what influence they will actually have. While the plethora of acronyms suggests a diversity of perspectives and a healthy variety of interests, in fact there are just a small number of ideologies around which these units cluster, as demonstrated below in Table 1.

**Table 1: Major epistemes contending at global level**

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<td>Neoliberal developmentalism</td>
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<td>Human rights developmentalism</td>
<td>Growth Plus</td>
<td>Social mobility</td>
<td>Human rights</td>
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<td>Post-developmentalism</td>
<td>Social transformation</td>
<td>Social democratic impulse</td>
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Nation-state governments still hold primary responsibility for organising, implementing, and funding national social services such as health and [mass formal] education. However, the supra-national organisations focusing on education have influence
disproportionate to their small number, and this is especially evident in low-income countries. Just four agencies, the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, UNESCO, and UNICEF dominate global education discourse for poorer nations (Carnoy, 2000; Morrow & Torres, 2000). Among these, the World Bank is by far the largest, wealthiest, and most influential (Goldstein, 2004; Power, 2007). In addition, bilateral donors wield great influence, though in the past decade their priorities have nearly always been in accord with WB precedents. Non-governmental organisations continue to have significant influence too, though they also operate primarily in concordance with mainstream practice. And then there is a large cadre of international professionals who perform critical services such as planning, goal-setting, and budgeting with relatively little accountability (Preston, 2005; see McNamara, 1999a, 1999b for a Cambodia-specific example). And finally, non-Western influence on education in Asia is insufficiently acknowledged and documented, despite the fact that the regional powerhouses of China, South Korea, and Japan are clearly jockeying for influence. These nations do not necessarily restrict themselves to the rules or language of the current super-structure, have distinctly different perspectives on transparency and accountability, and are thus difficult to account for. Their influence on policy and practice is usually clear only after the fact.

**How Does Globalisation Affect Education?**

The phenomenon of globalisation has direct as well as indirect impact on the educational enterprise. Spring (2009) posits that the “globalization of education refers to the worldwide discussion, processes, and institutions affecting local educational practices and policies” (p.1). This rather benign definition leaves room for recognition of informal as well as formal influences. Informal influences are beyond the direct control of the education-focused aid apparatus: this includes, for instance, computer and communications technology
Ideas and information, of all sorts and quality, are readily and rapidly exchanged in a burgeoning (computerised) public sphere and thus accessible to a greater extent and more quickly by more people. The “third place,” social surroundings distinct from “home” and “work” that foster creative interaction (Oldenburg, 1989), has definitely gone global, inconsistent computer and internet coverage notwithstanding.

Migration too, both forced and voluntary, presents a morass of new issues to education systems around the world as educators and administrators debate language of instruction, comparability of certification, holiday norms, room for religious education, and so forth (Dale, 2000; Fitzsimons, 2000; Green, Little, Kamat, Oketch & Vickers, 2007; Spring, 2008). Both of these phenomena – information and communication technology (ICT) and people movement – have incalculable impact on education. Thus, it is clear that globalisation exerts formal and informal influences on education systems, as well as on the individuals who participate in educational events and processes.

**Educational borrowing and lending**

For nearly as long as comparative education has existed as a field of study (more than two hundred years) it has paid close attention to the complex phenomenon of educational borrowing and lending, also described as “educational transfer” (Phillips, 2006). This literature provides insight into current dynamics of educational reform and enactment around the world, “the phenomenon of transnational transfer, globalization, and international convergence in education” (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004, p. 2). Now, as previously, it is vital to emphasise the importance of understanding and analysing the context of the transfer, translation, and transformation of policy from one location to another (Cowen, 2006). Over time, variables in the equation have changed, and arguably the most significant of these is the
identity of the actors, and levels of interaction. Formerly borrowing and lending occurred as a transaction exclusively between nation-states, and was the purview of technical specialists first and politicians second. Now, while that level of transfer continues to exist, in some contexts the international community exerts greater influence than individual nation-states do in setting the policy agenda and specialist technicians and politicians may not be the primary drivers of change. Education ideals appear to vary according to national economic status, as does the identity of promotional agents: high income nations are influenced toward competitiveness by the OECD’s promotion of standardised testing and national rankings, and by the vagaries of credentialing across regional blocs. Low-income nations are more preoccupied with the UN-generated priorities of getting young children into school and increasing female literacy rates.

The field of educational borrowing and lending has generated some useful schematics for understanding the processes whereby policies travel and are adopted. Chief among those in current circulation is Phillips (2004) who postulates a “theory of policy attraction in education” comprised of four iterative stages: cross-national attraction, decision, implementation, and the internalisation stage which can take the form of synthesis (also called indigenisation) or antithesis/rejection. Catalysts for change may be positive (desire to incorporate new technology) or negative (war and natural disasters or dissatisfaction with existing comparative national ranking). Phillips allows that there are different kinds of decisions. He identifies four types: 1) theoretical decisions based on perceived merit of the new idea, 2) “phoney” decisions (“where political expediency results in lip-service being paid to the attractiveness of features of education elsewhere, with little will…for implementation”), 3) “practical” decisions, and 4) decisions aimed at achieving a “quick fix” (p. 57-58). Implementation necessarily involves some adaptation of foreign models and methods. While Phillips’ model is sufficiently general
to provide a potentially useful frame for understanding and defining events and variables which (may) occur at policy level, it suggests perhaps too much rationality in the decision-making process. And Phillips’ work is limited in its ability to illuminate the fourth stage - what happens with policy at the level of everyday classroom practice which is the level that really matters (Wells, 2006). Further, as it is based on research done in industrialised Western nations, not surprisingly Phillips’ model suggests more thoughtful and independent agency by national governments in each stage than may genuinely be the case given historical determinants and cultural predispositions.

Johnson (2006) intentionally addresses this shortcoming by proposing a conceptual framework for understanding policy transfer in developing countries. He offers five metaphors which at least partially describe the political and economic forces shaping policy progression: telling (imposition by external actors), rebelling (resistance by the recipient country), compelling (negotiated under constraint), selling (globalisation and international educational markets), and gelling (convergence of indigenous and foreign sources). These are not necessarily experienced in linear fashion. While Johnson’s work is helpfully descriptive, it is perhaps insufficiently analytical (focusing on “what,” rather than on “why” and “how”) and, curiously, it contains only passing reference to international community influence as a benign, disinterested benefactor rather than what it often is: donors with a particular agenda. For Johnson’s framework, colonial traces seem to wield the greatest influence. Like Phillips, Johnson’s work does little to explain actual implementation.

What any theoretical framework attempting to explain ostensible policy convergence must more seriously consider is the intensely active presence of transnational “educational policy networks” (Wells, 2006) comprised of groups such as the OECD, World Bank, regional
banks (such as ADB), and UN agencies. These groups directly influence the way education is conceptualised and implemented. Lingard & Rawolle (2011) concur that for education one result of globalisation has been a “rescaling of educational politics and policy-making” and relocation of “some political authority to an emergent global education policy field” (p. 489). They assert that “the nation-state is no longer fully sovereign in matters of education and particularly in respect of education policy production and focus” (p. 499) and describe the now taken-for-granted concept of “knowledge economy” as one example:

The knowledge economy emerged as a policy concept (a globalised policy discourse) within the global education policy field during the 1990s, alongside other competitor concepts such as the knowledge society and learning society…. These…concepts were developed and proselytised by a number of competing international organisations or transnational policy actors (e.g. the OECD and the World Bank). (Lingard & Rawolle, 2011, p. 493)

**Neoliberalism as hegemonic ideal**

So far, it may appear that educational policy formulation is largely apolitical and objective, based upon rationale, apolitical, and objective decisions by technical professionals who carefully consider a host of clearly defined options. In reality, however, educational policies, and the processes by which they migrate, are essentially political (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). There is growing recognition that globalised education exhibits a distinct ideological trend (Carnoy, 2000; Stromquist, 2002), as “neoliberal economics has embraced education, in the form of human capital, as a means of expansion in the past two decades” (Rutkowski, 2007, p. 230). In essence:

globalization has changed the discursive terrain within which educational policies are developed and enacted, and…this terrain is increasingly informed by a range of neo-liberal precepts that have transformed not only the ways in which issues of educational governance but also of education’s basic purposes are considered and debated (Rizvi et al., 2005, p. 5).
The neoliberal economic agenda seeks to maximise the role of the “free market” and minimise the role of the State through privatisation, deregulation, (trade) liberalisation, and decentralisation. For education, such a perspective promotes a largely economic emphasis on social efficiency at the expense of a more cultural focus on democratic equality (Rizvi et al., 2005). A neoliberal orientation to education promotes an artificial link between education and economic productivity (Resnik, 2005; Rutkowski, 2007; Tarabini, 2008).

Furthermore, this perspective renders education a private (rather than a public) good, resulting in “education commodification” (less state resourcing, proliferation of for-profit schools, more public-private links, out-sourcing of services such as textbook production) (Altbach, 2002; Rutkowski, 2007). This in turn has implications for emphasis on particular subjects (business, maths, physical sciences replace arts and social sciences), as well as on content (Carnoy, 2000; Stromquist & Monkman, 2000). A neoliberal perspective on education also emphasises employment-oriented vocational training. Because it regards education first and foremost as a form of capital, such a system has a nearly singular emphasis on individual competitiveness. Business furnishes the major criteria for institutional and individual success (productivity, efficiency, cost-recovery rather than learning, equity, character); and the business model dictates greater managerial than technical emphasis among decision-makers (Stromquist & Monkman, 2000). There is a focus toward national, as well as international, testing and comparison (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; Wah & Ojendal, 2005). Of course not all of these particular aspects are felt in the same way or to the same extent in developing countries as in Western nations. For the global South, especially low-income nations, critical issues in education include devolution and decentralisation, access and equity, education of girls, curriculum, and the teaching of English language, as well as balancing public and private
funding, utilising information and communication technologies, and the flourishing global trade in education (Rizvi et al., 2005).

To say that the neoliberal agenda being accelerated through global networks affects education in philosophical, conceptual, and practical ways does not necessarily mean they should be understood as deterministic. Lingard’s (2000) application of “vernacular globalization” is a more satisfying conceptualisation of this relationship, as it acknowledges the strength and presence of external influences while including recognition of local agency in the ways that external influences are negotiated and enacted. A rich literature catalogues unique local responses by individuals (and to a lesser extent, systems) in the global South (rejection, resistance, adaptation, acceptance) to exogenous concepts. Still, it is difficult to deny the degree to which nearly identical structures, schedules, and curriculum characterise schooling around the global (Anderson-Levitt, 2003).

**Theories of similarities in education systems**

Worldwide mass education rapidly expanded after World War II (Resnik, 2006; Stromquist, 2000). The ensuing extent of similarity in education systems around the world is well documented (Arnove & Torres, 2007; Baker & LeTendre, 2005). There are multiple ways to analyse this phenomenon of a global culture of schooling. Anderson-Levitt (2003) identifies two major theoretical explanations for similarities: World Culture and World Systems. World Culture theorists suggest that schools are converging toward a single common model in imitative response to the diffusion of a more general template of a modern nation-state, and the social pressure inherent in operating such a large-scale, complex project (Anderson-Levitt, 2003, p. 3-4). World Systems theorists (including neo-Marxist, postcolonial, and critical perspectives) posit that Western-style schools have been largely imposed, first by Euro-
American imperialism, and increasingly by indigenous elite for purposes of capital accumulation (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Resnik, 2006). This view takes its theoretical underpinning from dependency theory.

Resnik (2006) notes three theoretical attempts to explain the apparent homogenisation of schooling around the world: convergence theories, neo-Marxist views, and neo-institutionalism (p. 173). Convergence theories, based on the notion of equilibrium, see modernisation as the driver toward convergence. Neo-Marxist perspectives, rooted in conflict theories of social organisation, see (neo)colonialism and (neo)imperialism as the sources of similarity. And third, neo-institutionalists attribute convergence in systems and practice to the intentional propagation of particular ideals by the international organisations constructed after WW II (World Bank, UNESCO, etc.) with the ostensible aim of promoting global prosperity and stability.

A fourth distinct way of viewing global schooling, one which applies a distinctly anthropological perspective, takes exception to the simplistic depiction of homogeneity (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). This view could be called culturalist or localist. Academics writing from this perspective provide multiple examples of idiosyncratic enactment of education at micro and local levels (classroom) as evidence of resistance (Jungck, 2003; Luke & Luke, 2003; Tharpe & Dalton, 2007). Perhaps for LICs a fifth platform is possible to envision – a hybrid culturalist/localist perspective which allows for strong transnational influence at policy level but also acknowledges significant variance at the level of school and classroom practice.

**Education in low-income countries**

Education in LICs is very much influenced by the global aid apparatus, from conceptualisation to funding, curriculum, pedagogy, and scheduling (Spring, 2008). Resnik
(2006) concurs that this “world education apparatus” (p. 195) consists of organisation at the global level which relates through international organisations’ forums, conferences, institutes, internet sites, assemblies, and so forth. Global aid also goes by the name of “international development” and though education is not development’s only focus, it is certainly a rising star on the global stage (Tarabini, 2008). Currently the influence of the organisations comprising the global education super-structure is most clearly demonstrated by the domination of the Education for All / Millennium Development Goals (MDG) meta-narrative (Goldstein, 2004; Jones, 2007; King, 2007; Mundy 2006, 2007; Tarabini, 2010). EFA promotes free, quality basic education, life skills, and literacy for children and youth. The MDG is a global campaign aimed at “freeing people from extreme poverty and multiple deprivations.” Two of its eight goals relate specifically to education – promotion of universal primary education and gender equality and empowerment for women.

Nation-states, perhaps especially poorer nation-states, are no longer the sole proprietor of their educational priorities and systems – they are being actively converged toward a particular policy and model of practice by very powerful multilateral organisations, chief among them, the World Bank (Dale, 1999; Resnik, 2006; Rutkowski, 2007). International and multilateral organisations have helped to structure a normative understanding of what education is and does (Lingard & Rawolle, 2011; Mundy, 2007). The current situation, then, is one where “universal public access to free basic education has now achieved status and legitimacy as a global public good on a scale not realised during the 20th century” (Mundy, 2006, p. 45). This has not always been the case.

Resnik (2006) explores the origins and growth of a “world education culture” that occurred post-World War Two (1950s-1960s). During this period the emphasis in Europe was
on stimulating economic growth, first focusing on employment, and then quickly thereafter on education. Education was regarded as a central component in Europe’s economic growth plan: this notion of the inextricable link between formal mass education and economic growth was then exported to the global South. The current global agenda for development continues to attribute a key role to education in the fight against poverty (Tarabini, 2008), seeing it as the “missing link” that will facilitate economic growth and poverty reduction (Hirosato & Kitamura, 2009; Mundy, 2006).

How did the apparent consensus for a global agenda for education emerge? Dale (1999) suggests the use of five mechanisms: harmonisation, dissemination, standardisation, interdependence, and imposition. These he contrasts with traditional convergence mechanisms of policy borrowing to suggest that multilateral agencies are pursuing their particular agenda with much more intentionality than even a decade ago. Rutkowski (2007) refers to the (intentional) process of forming global consensus around educational priorities as “soft convergence” defined as a “set of complex actions and policy recommendations that exploit growing world interconnectedness” (p. 229). Four such means of ensuring compliance include construction of: multilateral space for formation of soft laws (non-enforceable conventions such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which “guarantees” basic education for all children); the means to directly implement policy through loans and grants; a multilateral space to create and exchange policy knowledge; and promotion of the concept of being experts in measuring and evaluating educational policy. King (2007) shares a similar view that the global consensus ostensibly demonstrated by EFA/MDG is neither truly global nor unproblematic, by showing how involvement of countries from the global South was “minor if not minimal” in the entire process of construction of the educational dimension of the global development
agenda that occurred from 1990-2006. He is not alone in contending that the education agenda has been increasingly simplified (Jones, 2007), to the detriment of citizens of low-income nations. Many in the global South are also demanding expansion of the global vision for education as the nearly exclusive focus on primary education is simplistic and inadequate and serves to exacerbate global inequalities (Malhotra, 2000).

Discomfort is growing with the limited nature of globalised educational priorities, and the negative impact now visible at classroom, as well as national level. Major points of contention include: the issue of quality (sacrificed on the altar of rapid mass access, see Somerset, 2011); the “education-poverty orthodoxy represented by universal primary education” (which regards education as a road out of poverty although there is no empirical evidence to support such a direct causal link, Cremin & Nakabugo, 2012; Khaniya & Williams, 2004; King, McGrath & Rose, 2007); the way that human capital discourse exacerbates discrimination of marginalized groups (see Ron-Balsera, 2011); whether or not there are universals applicable to the field of education (Elliott, 2007; Tharp & Dalton, 2007; Schweisfurth, 2011).

Of course the transnational educational community is not a monolith: underlying different emphases and activities are different philosophical starting points. Generally speaking, the World Bank’s view is predicated on a human capital perspective, while the UN paradigm is rights-based (Therien, 1999. p. 723; Vaughan, 2010). NGOs have been caught up in the maelstrom of interest and activity generated by the MDG and are engaging with multilateral agencies to an unprecedented extent (Mundy, 2006). In many cases NGOs appear to whole-heartedly support and promote the global agenda of (quality) primary education for all children everywhere and especially girls. It is not clear what their role will be in the long-term, whether or not they will “break” with the current global agenda, and for what reasons.
As discussed, the international community, and especially international financial institutions (IFIs) and UN agencies (and NGOs to a lesser extent), exert a strong influence on education in low-income nations (Colclough, 2008). Perhaps because of the breadth of their constituency, and the political, social, cultural variables represented therein, the codified aims emanating from events organised by this global community tend to be minimalist, and thereafter in implementation are reduced even further to simplistic, quantitative goals that may bear little resemblance to the sentiments of the originators. This is the case between EFA statements in 1990 and current MDG statements (Unterhalter & North, 2010). Indeed, practitioners, policy-makers, and academics alike publically admit that EFA and MDG indicators are not necessarily representative of the wider educational aims espoused in the original EFA campaign in 1990. Even from a purely technical and apolitical perspective, the MDG indicators are deficient because they do not measure well what they purport to, and results of applying the indicators can be understood very differently depending upon interpretation, and thus be potentially misleading (Lewin, 2011). This sort of distortion occurs at all stages of the policy game: formulation, promulgation, implementation, assessment. One clear demonstration of this reductionism is how in many LICs, gender mainstreaming has become a depoliticised, purely technical process rather than a political contestation toward transformative shifts in power-relations (Karlsson, 2010; Unterhalter & North, 2010).

**International Development and Education**

Over its 60-year lifespan, international development has certainly disappointed, but it has never ceased to inspire. Action and rhetoric by supporters and detractors alike continue to focus debate about how to (de)construct a better, more humane, equitable, and less poor world. Development theorising can be understood as an effort to conceptualise both an end result, as
well as the means for “developing”. Four such theoretical traditions are commonly identified: (neo)modernisation, dependency theory (neo-Marxist orientation), alternative (or people-centred) development, and the post-development perspective which also increasingly includes attention to postcolonial theorising (Angeles, 2004; Peet & Hardwick, 2009; Rist, 1997; Stromquist, 2002). Within each of these paradigms ideally wrought, the goal of aid, the definition or “vision” of development, and aid modalities (actors, priorities, principles, mechanisms of delivery, accountability, etc.) differs (Robertson et al., 2007).

This rendering is obviously simplistic. There have been significant shifts within each of the different paradigms, as well as a tendency to incorporate similar themes so that differences now are not as pronounced as they have historically been. And in practice, there is increasing cooperation and collaboration between non-governmental organisations and multilateral agencies which also reduces (in appearance if not reality) the divide between these different perspectives (Mundy, 2007; Pellini, 2007). Additionally, themes taken up by different theoretical traditions, while not constituting theory per se, certainly influence the way that development is done. Chief among these are “participation,” “sustainability,” “human security,” and “knowledge economy” (Chambers, 2004; Robertson et al., 2007), all of which are currently operational. However, modernisation (and derivatives) still dominates discourse and practice of international development.

**Major theories of development**

**Modernisation theory.** Mainstream, or classic development theory, is based on the concept of “modernization” which regards development as linear progress toward an edenic future of industrialisation and technology. The aim is economic growth toward which the construction of liberal capitalist institutions will, its proponents contend, move a country very
far (Brett, 2000). This view regards barriers primarily in terms of internal conditions of particular countries (Peet & Hartwick, 2009). Along the way, classic modernisation theorists have made concessions toward quality of economic growth as both the possibility and desirability of infinite rates of growth has been called into question (Robertson et al., 2007). Largely, changes have been made in the form of shifts back and forth between reliance on market mechanisms and central planning for addressing poverty. In this view, poverty remains (inadequately) conceptualised as an [exclusively] economic state.

Because both poverty and wealth, and the gap between rich and poor, were observed to increase in degree and scope, an exclusive focus on economic growth gave way to a “basic needs approach” (BNA) aimed at “growth with redistribution” (Hirosato, 2009; Rist, 1997). A decade later, “development and growth” took centre stage in acknowledgement of the fact that economic growth and development were not necessarily commensurate. Now the popular mantra is “poverty reduction” which suggests awareness that economic growth does not necessarily result in reduced poverty, and that a redistributive framework may be required (Hirosato, 2009). Each successive wave has been more socially and environmentally sensitive, less narrowly economic, incrementally bringing together multilateral agencies with the formal NGO sector, and, to a lesser extent, civil society (Green et al., 2007; Robertson et al., 2007).

These shifts in focus are commonly marked by multilateral agency publications such as UNDP’s initial Human Development Report: Concept and Measurement of Human Development (1990) and the World Bank’s World Development Report series. Other such watershed documents include the following. Club of Rome’s Limits to Growth (1972) modeled the consequences of a burgeoning human population and finite resources. Dag Hammarskjold Foundation’s What Now? (1975) highlighted the impossibility of a universal
formula for development. The Brundtland Commission’s *Our Common Future* (1987) addressed “the accelerating deterioration of the human environment and natural resources and the consequences of that deterioration for economic and social development”. Nobel-prize winning economist Amartya Sen’s *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlements and Deprivation* (1982) and subsequent *Development as Freedom* (1999) sparked attention to the concept of human “capabilities” in contrast to deficit-oriented perceptions of underdevelopment. As a last example in a by no means exhaustive list, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation’s (FAO) *Rome Declaration on World Food Security* and the *World Food Summit Plan of Action* (1996-7) highlighted the inequitable results of global economic growth and the political travesty of widespread global hunger, and identified the need to focus on distribution not only production issues.

Despite the numerous rhetorical turns, arguably the core tenets of the modernisation paradigm have not changed fundamentally. Neoliberal economic theory underpins the current mainstream modernisation perspective, demonstrated in policy form in what is known as the Washington Consensus (WC) and the slightly less rigid Post-Washington Consensus (PWC) (J. Chan, 2007; Gore, 2000; Klees, 2008; Robertson et al., 2007). Even the much lauded Millennium Development Goals can be understood as “serving more as legitimation mechanisms, softening the harshness of neoliberal globalisation with the rhetoric of fairness and equity” (Klees, 2008, p. 410). Ferguson’s (1994) classic portrayal of what he termed the “development industry” holds true more than a decade later, though it could be said that the main outcome is now a neoliberal economic outlook rather than expansion of bureaucratic state power in ordinary people’s lives.
Dependency theory and “underdevelopment.” The second major theoretical tradition is an essentially neo-Marxist perspective which includes the attendant New International Economic Order (NIEO), the World Systems approach that emerged in direct response to Dependency Theory, and the self-reliance movement (Rist, 1997). Dependency theorists posit that underdevelopment is a direct result of exploitation of peripheral countries by core countries. The primary obstacles to development are regarded as external; genuine development is only achieved through non-capitalist routes or by rigorous state control of markets and redistributive mechanisms (Brett, 2000).

Dependency theorists are criticised by both modernisation and alternative development proponents for being long on criticism and short on constructive alternatives; they are also criticised for not challenging capitalist fundamentals, instead questioning only the way that capitalism generates and distributes wealth. Other major criticisms of dependency theory include its inability to explain different development trajectories for different developing nations and its failure to see the negative aspects of elitism in the South.

Education within the dependency theory view is regarded as an important part of eliminating dependence on foreign aid and trade. Dependency theories proposed:

Focusing on [providing] mass education through a more equitable distribution of educational opportunities and programs, ensuring a more cogent link between education and rural needs, and decentralizing control of education in order to raise the collective consciousness of rural populations. (Ayers, 2000, p. 445)

A vision for “alternative development” Also called “people-centred development,” the third wave in development theorising is more of a movement than a full-fledged theory, a catch-all label for ideas opposing elements of orthodox modernisation. Some examples of alternative ideas are “post-economics” scholarship (Angeles, 2004, p. 63), as well as a “development and...[poverty, HIV/AIDS, education; gender, good governance,
“empowerment” agenda of practice (Angeles, 2004); “emancipatory development theory” (Brett, 2000); an “obligations-based approach” (Chambers, 2004); Pieterse’s (1998) “reflexive development”; a “social transformation approach” (Castles, 2000); and Nordveit’s (2002) application of complexity theory to questions of social change. The World Social Forum movement and non-formal mobilisation of civil society could also be included among this “loose set of partly descriptive/partly heuristic notions…” (Schuurman, 2000).

While there is no singular view within this paradigm for what education should look like or achieve, there is general agreement about the need to incorporate into education policy and planning, indigenous ways of knowing as well as locally relevant curricula (including attention to language of instruction) (Hickling-Hudson, 2004; Quist, 2001; Reagan, 2008; Soudien, 2005; Spring, 2009; Tabulawa, 2003). These two points, alternative development proponents hold in common with post-developmentalist.

**Post-development** The fourth major perspective, “post-development” regards “development” as a Western socio-political construct which denigrates, derides, and destroys (recipients) rather than respecting their humanity and improving their lives and habitat as it purports to do (Escobar, 1994). The post-developmental school is soundly criticised for being insufficiently theoretical, and consisting of “simplistic and oppositional claims without offering its own constructive alternative” (Brigg, 2002).

As with the alternative development, there is no single coherent version of an ideal education offered by post-developmentalist. Rather, mass formal education is more often discussed in terms of what it should NOT [be, do, contain] than in how it might usefully be employed toward achievement of an equitable, sustainable, respectful future (Ki-Zerbo, Kane, Archibald, Lizop, & Rahnema, 1997; Nandy, 1997; Ramonet, 1997).
Postcolonial perspectives Postcolonial theorising about international development is often elided from contemporary framing of development theories because it rests more comfortably within the academic fields of literary criticism or cultural studies and because of the confusion caused by what Biccum (2002) terms the “problematic of periodisation” (pp. 34-35), a narrow focus on (a) specific temporal location and geographically-defined imperial powers invoked by the word “colonial”. When included, postcolonial analysis is invariably placed within the post-development frame. However, increasingly there are calls for explicit engagement with development by postcolonial theorists (Biccum, 2002; Sylvester, 1999). Such engagement will benefit from understanding that postcolonial theory is actually a constellation of ideas rather than a narrowly and neatly defined frame for analysis.

To begin with, even “postcolonial” itself is a problematic term for several reasons (Biccum, 2002; Kumar, 2000; Mbembe, 2008; Shohat, 1992; Tikly & Crossley, 2004). The prefix (“post”) is both a chronological and historical marker (i.e. the end of an era known as classical colonialism). It also references the ascendance of philosophical concepts posed by post-structuralism and post-modernism – namely the “de-centring of meta-theory and preoccupation with monocausal explanations and universal ‘truth’” (Simon, 2006, p. 10). However, many contend that colonialism persists, although now under the guise of globalisation motivated by market capitalism (which is to say we have not moved beyond “colonialism”). Second, using “post” in its philosophic sense is potentially misleading because rejection of one meta-narrative simply replaces it with another. Third, historic imperial/colonial relationships have morphed and in some cases the global rather than the (classic) nation-state colonial is the reference for local. This is the case for Singapore (Huat, 2008) and Vietnam (Raffin, 2008). Further, there are instances of the colonised becoming
colonisers such as Indonesia in East Timor. And finally, it is impossible now to distinguish simple lines of influence. In this category, Robinson (2003) notes as an example, the Chinese mainland hegemony of Chinese scholarship.

A brief overview of postcolonial genealogy helps explain the complexity inherent in this term (Sylvester, 1999). The term “post colonial” (with/without a hyphen) originated in literary criticism (Francophone and African) and cultural studies in the 1950s and gained significant [academic] momentum and some notoriety in other disciplines with Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978). It achieved additional currency and a distinct South Asian configuration with the recognition of “subaltern studies” (Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1988) and it (re)acquired a contemporary Afro-centric perspective with the publication of Loomba’s (1989) *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. More recently, but only to a limited extent, postcolonial thought has been employed by (post)Development Studies to expose the Eurocentrism at the heart of the idea of development and to “interrupt the discourse of development” (Brigg, 2002; Sylvester, 1999; White, 2002) in order to think beyond development and generate alternative understandings and forms of modernity (Biccum, 2002; Simon, 2006). Spivak explains that current development discourse takes for granted “the North’s superiority over the South…” (cited in Kapoor, 2004, p. 629; Biccum, 2002) and normalises Western-style development. In dominant development discourse, “the epistemic violence of imperialism is that Western superiority and dominance are naturalised as ‘the order of things’”; and this violence “occurs not only along a geographic, West/Third World axis, but also as ‘class apartheid’ where we have an elite global professional class that projects developmentalist/ethnocentric mythologies onto the subaltern” (Spivak cited in Kapoor, 2004, p. 629). McEwan (2001) asserts:

A postcolonial approach to development literature…can say a great deal about the apparatuses of power and domination within which those texts are produced,
circulated and consumed…it is therefore imperative to explore the links between the words, practices and institutional expressions of development and between the relations of power that order the world and the words and images that represent the world (p. 103).

Andreotti characterises postcolonial theory as “the name given to a set of debates about North-South relations arising from various disciplines and ‘movements’” (2007a, p. 3). Her identification of five such areas of contention demonstrates how naturally this theoretical bundle could be turned to analyse international development. Those include 1) problematising how the Third World is represented including issues of power, voice, and cultural subordination/domination; 2) questioning the very concept of development, and visions of reality assumed/imposed as universal; 3) recognising the violence inherent in colonisation but also acknowledging productive outcomes of the colonial endeavour; 4) troubling of Eurocentrism and benevolence; and 5) debating issues of identity, belonging and representation, as well as romanticisation of the South (p. 3).

There are four common criticisms of postcolonial analysis of development. First, some contend that it has an inordinate focus on the discursive at the expense of the material; that it is more concerned with voice than poverty, or as Sylvester (1999) colourfully explains, “…how the colonial and postcolonial era affects the way people label and think of themselves, and fight among each other, is, to put it meanly, seemingly more important in postcolonial studies than questions of whether people eat” (p. 715). Second, it assumes ethnocentric essentialism (for both coloniser and colonised). A third common critique is postcolonialism’s strongly voiced relativism, an uncritical privileging of local over the global. And finally, postcolonial thinking tends toward a totalising or essentialising outlook of coloniser/colonised, victor/vanquished. In sum, postcolonial theorising is regarded as insufficiently nuanced to be practically applicable.
English-language postcolonial theorising does indeed allocate insufficient attention to the influence of non-Western (neo)colonisers (Biccum, 2002; Sylvester, 1999). It is disingenuous to presume ethnocentric essentialism along historic lines, to equate “Western” with “coloniser” and “non-Western” with “colonised” (Simon, 2006). This particular binary may well be the case: but it is not necessarily so. For instance, China, India, and Japan have historically wielded an enormous scope and degree of (global) hegemonic influence. Further, Western postcolonial theorising is reluctant to recognise the presence and influence of local elites, sometimes lapsing into “futile romanticisation of premodern times” (Ziai, 2004, p. 1045) or “uncritical…celebration of the local” (Kiely, 1999, p. 30). Thus a postcolonial perspective may implicitly suggest that colonisers invented oppression and are thereby doubly responsible for current inequities, though perhaps not directly involved in promulgating them. However, it is probably more accurate to note that oppressive hierarchical tendencies exists within all cultures, though expressed to a greater or lesser extent and in various forms. Western neoliberal philosophy is not the sole purveyor of elite-ism or oppression. The tendency toward domination is, rather, part of the human condition – expressed differently across cultures and political views, but historically omnipresent and always inequitably privileging a minority. An excellent example of this specific to the context of this inquiry is provided by Chandler who notes that there were 14 categories for slave in pre-Angkorian Cambodia (2008, p. 29).

In summary, there exists no standardised single definition or description of postcolonial theory partly because of its valorisation of eclecticism (Viruru, 2005). And there exists no widespread agreement upon its subject of primary focus (is it limited to historical colonial relationships or applicable to any exploitative or discriminative practices?) (Biccum, 2002; Rukundwa & van Aarde, 2007). Nevertheless, there is some consensus that if understood in its
broadest sense as a political discourse, a “theoretical tool of analysis concerned with relationships of cultural difference and territorial conquest…a method of inquiry…free from being confined temporally to the specific historical era of colonialism and [able to include] analyses of the ongoing development of capitalism and the process of globalisation” (Postcolonialism, 2008), then certainly postcolonial thought can directly and constructively interrupt the discourse of development (Andreotti, 2007a, 2007b, 2011; Biccum, 2002; Sylvester, 1999) as well as the project of formal education. In this sense, one of its most important contributions to the exploration of policy travel and adaptation, which is the focus of this research, may be “recognition of the blurred lines between indigenous and foreign knowledge” (Sylvester, 1999, p. 710).

**Women (gender) in (and) development**: Because this research seeks to explicate the influence of global gender discourse on gendered identities and relations in Cambodia, it is also important to trace theoretical perspectives, and practical expressions, of feminisms on development. These narratives have come to be called “gender and development” (Cornwall, Harrison & Whitehead, 2007). The sub-sector of gender and education is addressed in a separate section below. It should be noted at the outset that gender and development, by any name, is not a unified field and is defined variously by different forms of feminism. As Cornwall, Harrison, and Whitehead (2007) point out, there are (plural/multiple) feminisms and theories of development.

The underlying impetus for focusing on women in the development equation (perhaps more accurately rendered as an interest in development’s impact on women) has come largely from global feminists who vary in their analysis of the source of female subordination and thus solutions. But interest in women/development has quickly been assimilated, and some would
content that it has been co-opted, by international institutions that comprise the development industry where the word “feminist” is seldom, if ever, heard. This field has also been rendered simplistically in a dizzying succession of acronyms and terms: women in development (WID), women and development (WAD), women’s empowerment, gender and development (GAD), gender mainstreaming, and gender justice. Each represents a different angle for analysing female subordination.

Until the late 1960s, women were largely ignored by modernisation theory and the field of international development. By the early 1970s there was growing consensus that the industrialisation strategies pushed by Western nations for the so-called “developing nations” had largely failed; this is the period when the basic-needs approach surfaced. Esther Boserup’s landmark publication in 1970, *Women's Role in Economic Development*, clearly demonstrated that agricultural development had failed to consider women though women comprised more than half of the agricultural labour force in developing nations. These converging waves marked the commencement of a theoretical perspective that became known as “women in development” (WID). An approach that evolved from a liberal feminist framework, WID “calls for greater attention to women in development policy and practice, and emphasises the need to integrate them into the development process” (Reeves & Baden, 2000, p. 33). WID emphasised equal access to resources for women and men (as lack of resources was regarded as a major reason for subordination – see Razavi & Miller, 1995), integration of women into existing development projects, and aimed to increase women’s productive efficiency toward larger aims of national economic development (Connelly, Li, MacDonald & Parpart, 2000). A perceived shortcoming with the WID approach, that it was merely integrative, did not critique structural injustice, and also ignored non-Western knowledge and social constructs, were
countered with WAD. Simply stated, WAD promoted women-only development projects.

“The WAD paradigm stresses the distinctiveness of women’s knowledge, women’s work, and women’s goals and responsibilities. It argues for recognition of this distinctiveness and for acknowledgement of the special roles that women have always played in the development process.” (Connelly, Li, MacDonald & Parpart, 2000, p. 60)

Gender and Development (GAD) emerged in the 1980s as an attempt to address fundamental factors that structure and maintain gender inequalities, as well as a response to calls for Third World feminism, in contrast to hegemonic versions of global female solidarity and sisterhood, articulated in Mohanty’s *Under Western Eyes* (1988) essay. GAD, as a concept, distinguishes between the terms “sex” (biological or physiological differences between male and female) and “gender” (masculinity and femininity as social constructions), asserting that “what is biological is fixed and unchangeable, but what is social is subject to change and should be the focus of attention for gender theorists” (Connelly, Li, MacDonald & Parpart, 2000, p. 37). Thus is gender understood as an analytic category (joining class, race, ethnicity) which intersects with other social factors to influence life experiences of individuals as well as groups (p. 37). Subordination, in this picture, is not a result of inherent (biological) inferiority but rather, a result of socio-political and economic constructs which privilege males.

By the 1990s, gender had become a common refrain throughout the development world, though in many instances it did not initiate projects any different from activities popular under WID. Gender mainstreaming emerged in the mid-1990s when it was adopted at the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing. There it was defined as follows:

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design,
implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality. (UN Division for the Advancement of Women, 2000, p. 2).

However, rather than being the watershed for social transformation and gender equality it was envisioned as, gender mainstreaming has subsequently been turned into a technocratic category, a set of tools, frameworks, and mechanisms which substitute for constructive action (Karlsson, 2010; Mukhopadhyay, 2007; Unterhalter & North, 2010; Woodford-Berger, 2007).

Under each one of these discourse streams, females (vis-à-vis males) are represented in particular ways depending upon the agenda of the proponents. That is, a set of “gender myths and feminist fables” (Cornwall, Harrison & Whitehead, 2008) depicting women alternatively as “abject victims” and “splendid heroines” (Cornwall, Harrison & Whitehead, 2007, p. 4) has been devised as a way to simplify complex realities and make them palatable for a wide audience. These “bowdlerized, impoverished or, for some, just plain wrong representations about gender issues” (Cornwall, Harrison, & Whitehead, 2008, p. 2) belie the complex lived realities of women in the Global South and thereby impede the possibility of creative, effective interventions.

The concept of empowerment, vital to the social transformation of subordinating structures and attitudes that feminists seek, is seldom heard in gender and development discourse. And, the term “feminist” is virtually absent in globalised renderings of gender and development.

GAD had progressively assumed a life of its own, and ultimately became emptied of its basic feminist imperatives. In what seems to be a direction to more pressing issues of material deprivation and abuse of human rights, GAD then evolved as a realm of ‘problems’ largely constructed as a field with no competing discourses. The watered down version of the concept of gender has progressively made it possible for it to be used and/or abused, comfortably even in anti-feminist circles. (Akihire, 2008, p. 29)
And so it is that what we see is not what we get when it comes to public rhetoric about gender and development. This point is clearly made in a critique of the World Bank’s most recent *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development*:

That the World Bank has devoted its 2012 flagship publication to the topic of gender equality is a welcome opportunity for widening the intellectual space. However, it is also a missed opportunity. By failing to engage seriously with the gender biases of macroeconomic policy agendas that define contemporary globalization, and by reducing social policy to a narrow focus on conditional cash transfers, the report is unable to provide a credible and even-handed analysis of the challenges that confront gender equality in the 21st century and appropriate policy responses for creating more equal societies. (Razavi, 2011, p. 2)

**Social justice – potential for a new modus operandi?** The quest for practical and theoretical alternatives to standard economic frameworks for understanding poverty, inequality, and human development generally, has proliferated in the past decade. Participants in this field of endeavour do not necessarily align themselves with any of the major theoretical positions described above, though most do distance themselves at least implicitly from modernisation theory and its fellows. Among these efforts Sen’s “Capability Approach” (CA) has emerged as perhaps the leading alternative (Clark, 2005). Clark suggests that while it obviously bears resemblance to the basic needs approach popularised in the mid-1970s, “the CA extends beyond the analysis of poverty and deprivation [to] concern itself with well-being generally” (p. 3). Essentially, this approach troubles the linkage between income (commodity) and happiness (utility), suggesting instead that the objective of “development” should be defined in terms of an individual’s genuine freedom/ability (“capability”) to choose and achieve a particular life-style (‘beings’ and ‘doings’) which she/he deems desirable according to her/his values. In this schematic, “not enough information is provided by [simply] looking only at the commodities each [person] can successfully command. Instead we must consider
how well people are able to function with the goods and services at their disposal” (Clark, 2005, p. 3). “Underdevelopment” then, could be defined as the absence of capabilities.

The distinguished feminist philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2000, 2003) has conceptually extended the CA, and thereby countered a major criticism of Sen’s work as being excessively theoretical and insufficiently practical. Nussbaum defines a list of ten core capabilities which she contends are universally applicable: 1) life; 2) bodily health; 3) bodily integrity; 4) senses, imagination, thought; 5) emotions; 6) practical reason; 7) affiliation; 8) other species; 9) play; and 10) political and material control over one’s environment. In this context, development (or “human flourishing”) is constituted by the presence of, and “underdevelopment” by deprivation of, these capabilities (Nussbaum, 2000).

Another feminist philosopher, and critical theorist, Nancy Fraser (2000, 2003; Fraser & Honneth, 2003) addresses the challenge of social justice in the context of 21st century globalisation. Fraser argues that social justice requires three inter-related concepts: redistribution (of material goods and metaphysical resources such as opportunity), recognition (of difference, diversity, identity; eradication of negative status differentiation), and parity of participation (“social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers” (Fraser, 2003, para. 18)). Though it clearly has potential to make an important contribution to the intensifying dialogue around human flourishing in an era of globalisation, curiously, Fraser’s work is not often cited in this arena. An explicit exception to this is Chan’s (2007) writing on global governance reform as it relates to education. Fraser’s conceptualisation of justice is also implicitly embedded in Chan’s earlier call for “global educational justice” (Chan-Tiberghien, 2004).
Philosophical discussion about global social justice – the nature of obligation to disenfranchised others living near or far – also permeates the sector-specific dialogue around gender equality in education. Unterhalter (2008a) provides an excellent overview of major perspectives in her summary of three feminist scholars’ engagement with “cosmopolitanism” or global citizenship. “Debates about cosmopolitanism are concerned with normative explorations of the content, weight and processes entailed in the obligations we owe to those who are not citizens of the same state, but whose lives are affected by our actions, and who in turn affect our lives” (p. 540). Unterhalter explains that Nussbaum’s view of global obligations is framed in terms of the entitlements all people in the world have, that is, entitlement to “capabilities to function” (p. 547). Starting with duties rather than entitlements, Onora O’Neill argues that there are minimal global duties all people can agree upon by virtue of common humanity (Unterhalter, 2008a, p. 548). Iris Young offers a third perspective by theorising the notion of global obligations not from a process of abstraction (as in, statement of entitlements), but as a reflection on the level of structured social connection between people (for instance, garments produced in Cambodia and sold in Canada necessarily link the maker and the buyer though they will never meet one another) (pp. 548-549).

Social justice arguments are increasingly being voiced in dialogue around gender equality in education (Keddie, 2006; Unterhalter & North, 2011), as well as the quality of education generally (Tikly & Barrett, 2011; Walker, 2012). For example, Connell (2010) describes “educational justice” as concerned with:

not just the amount of education but what is learnt and the way knowledge functions in the social context. The case for gender justice in education has often been made on the basis of ‘rights’. But, ultimately, the case has to be an educational one, reflecting ideas of what makes a good education. A “good” education is judged by the quality of social life generated by the capacities that education yields. (Connell, 2010, p. 613).
Tikly and Barrett (2011) extend Connell’s point by offering an explicit definition of good quality education from a social justice perspective. They suggest that “good quality education” from this angle is necessarily inclusive, relevant, and democratic.

For our purposes then a good quality education is education that provides all learners with the capabilities they require to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies and enhance individual well-being. The learning outcomes that are required vary according to context but at the end of the basic education cycle must include at least threshold levels of literacy and numeracy as well as life skills, including awareness and prevention of disease. (Tikly & Barrett, 2011, p. 9)

**Summarising: Broad strokes, big trends.** While acknowledging the unique and specific contribution of the various theoretical dispositions to international development, it also seems possible to divide the field with broader strokes and to identify two main approaches to addressing poverty. These can be summarised as “human capital vs. human rights/basic needs”; or simply stated as “efficiency vs. equity” approaches. The first element in each pair is decidedly economic in focus, the other rooted in the more comprehensive concept of social justice. These two approaches have contending views of the role and purpose of education. Education under a “human capital” rubric is concerned with producing workers for the global market, equipping labourers with learning skills so they can readily adapt to a dynamic market, and an efficient system that “pays for itself” and does not weigh too heavily on state coffers. A “human rights” perspective, on the other hand, asserts the need for educational access for every individual regardless of ability to pay, development of character and individual ability, inculcation of a desire to learn for learning’s sake, and cultivation of cultural diversity. Social justice per se is a relatively new addition to this field. Inserting social justice into the simple binary stated above would expand the global contenders to include “efficiency vs. equity vs. (e)quality.” According to one of its most ardent and recognised proponents, education is an
issue not only of rights, but of justice, as it is fundamental to all human capabilities. Further, “Education should be construed not merely as a provider of useful skills, but also, and more centrally, as a general empowerment of the person through information, critical thinking, and imagination” (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 322–323 cited by Polat, 2011, p. 57).

**Competing models of education for development**

Education has always been part of the agenda for international development, and has largely reflected, rather than contested, mainstream development thinking (J. Chan, 2007). Major actors have historically been the World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, and Western bilateral donors. Increasingly, the education sector is subsumed under the mantle of economic policy, with economics taking the lead and education formulated as a means to economic end/s (Jones, 2007; Lingard, Rawolle & Taylor, 2005).

Shifts in emphasis and rationale in part result from alterations in the balance of power and influence particular organisations have within the “world education apparatus” (Resnik, 2005). Mundy (2006) provides a compelling picture of a “rather diffuse regime for educational cooperation” (p. 25) that emerged alongside international development as a field of engagement for UN and bilateral aid agencies at the end of the 1940s. She labels 1960-1995 the “education-for-development” regime, a period characterised by strong emphasis amongst multilateral organisations and states on universal right to education and mass public education, but also profound decentralisation and disorganisation, a limited range of actors, and a “fractious epistemic community” (Mundy, 2006, p. 25). The net result was that “while the global importance of education was widely accepted, a set of common priorities for educational development never gained traction or played much of a steering role among the

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3 The OECD plays for Europe and Western nations, a similar role to the World Bank as far as education goes for low-income countries: that is, an information clearing-house, setting priorities, conducting research, etc.
growing group of international donor organisations active in educational development” (Mundy, 2005, p. 28). Since 1995, education has evolved to become the new poster child of the global development agenda, a “magic bullet” that will lead to poverty reduction (Hirosato & Katamura, 2009, p. 19; Mundy, 2006; Tarabini, 2008).

Since 1945 five major thematic influences have been emphasised by the aid system for education in low-income countries (J. Chan, 2007; Green at al., 2007; Hirosato & Kitamura, 2009; Mundy, 1999, 2007; Resnik, 2006). In the 1950s-1960s, UNESCO took the lead on the global stage, pushing mass public schooling as a key to (economic) (re)construction and as a social/economic equaliser. With the ascent of the World Bank to dominance in the education sector (1960’s), from the 1960s to the early 1980s, a “basic needs approach” to education was popularised through an emphasis on quantitative aspects of education (buildings, getting kids into school). Significant funding was also directed to secondary, vocational, and higher education as fields linked directly to modernisation (Mundy, 2007).

The BNA was supplanted by the World Bank’s human capital approach in the 1980’s. This new perspective regarded education as an investment and thus began to concentrate almost exclusively on primary education as it was deemed more “cost effective” with a greater rate of return than secondary and tertiary education. Concurrent with WB’s emphasis on human capital, the 1990’s witnessed the rise of a “human rights” rationale for education which took a progressive perspective and regarded education as a key capacity linked also to non-economic benefits (social well-being, physical health, and so forth). And the fifth thematic influence, recognition of education as a social good and keeper of cultural identity and diversity, comes from the post-developmentalists and to a lesser extent is also present in the alternative development paradigm.
Beneath the rhetoric it is possible to discern two primary competing philosophies and one derivative (J. Chan, 2007). The dominant (neoliberal) view is essentially techno-economic. Based on human capital theory, this instrumentalist approach sees education as essentially economic, a “means to the “end” of economic success and capital accumulation, and fails to recognise social and cultural aspects as valid components of education (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Spring, 2009; Wrigley, 2007). A slightly less radical version of the neoliberal view could be called “human rights developmentalism” (J. Chan, 2007), as exemplified in the MDG. It is not completely devoid of attachment to an economistic outlook; but at least there is attention to human rights, diversity, and “local influence”.

The mainstream view of education for development stands in contrast to a social democratic view of “progressive education” (Spring, 2009); that is, education as self-evident good, with its major purpose being to free people to learn independently, and an overall aim of continual growth and learning for all people, as well as enabling people to represent themselves within the sphere of global governance (J. Chan, 2007). A current [radical] outworking of this version is identified by Chan (2007) as “post-developmentlalism”, where “education…takes on the broader significance of cultural revival as resistance to market fundamentalism” (p. 359). This regime includes what could be called “indigenous education” (Spring, 2009), an educational perspective more than a particular type, that recognises the existence and validity of different ways of knowing, and cultural influences on epistemology, pedagogy, and formation, and tries to actively make room for these in general educational discourse, as well as to preserve practice within indigenous settings.

These main educational paradigms run concurrently. Also, other educational forms and philosophies are currently at play in and around these major discourses. For instance Spring
(2009) identifies religious education as one such form, a type of education aimed at inculcating a particular morality and character, while including political ends.

**Limitations of different approaches**

**Human capital / “growth.”** An essential tenant of the “human capital/ economic growth” paradigm is that (free) market mechanisms will appropriately regulate. The flawed assumptions of this perspective are that everyone has equal access to the market, that the market is truly free, that all have equal access to information to enable them to take advantage of market benefits, that history and politics are simply incidental, that the possibility of social consensus is impossible and undesirable (Stromquist, 2002: p. 25). Thus, neoliberal faith in a market model applied to the education sector is likely to result in fragmented service delivery caused by weakened central (state) control without necessarily establishing a commensurate market force to provide comparable services (Pak et al., 2007). It also spawns a narrow version of accountability with a focus on micro-details of individual services rather than wider social outcomes like poverty reduction in a particular region. Neoliberalism assumes efficient markets, rule of law, political stability, and a lively democracy – these are simply not the case in many low-income nations.

A second major short-coming of this perspective is the neglect of cultural, social, and moral aspects of education. A market-based approach erodes the notion of education as a “common good” with clear implications for social organising and domination. It also leaves little room for active respect and incorporation of local/indigenous ways into curriculum and pedagogical practices. Third, Malhotra (2000) notes that education under an orthodox neoliberal regime is available on a “user pay” basis that discriminates against the poor and further enfranchises the wealthy. Malhotra asserts that it is not rational to equate “willingness
“to pay” as an indicator of the value of the “product” (education), with the “ability to pay.”

Neoliberal education is neither equitable nor egalitarian, and is therefore likely to increase disparity between and among people. Furthermore, there is clear empirical evidence that girl-children and poorer households are more negatively affected by privatisation than are boys (presumably because of the relative premium placed on males) and richer households (Malhotra, 2000, p. 368).

Finally, and perhaps most damning, Preston & Dyer (2003) assert that the key problem with the human capital view of education (as in: education = human capital = national wealth) is that it has never actually been shown to work. They point out that the wealth of the first industrial nations was not achieved by the educational principles of neo-classical economic theory (there was enormous state funding of mass public education and as intervention in industry), but that this is precisely the theory aimed at poorer countries. Preston & Dyer (2003) summarise: “while we have reliable understanding of individuated social effects of education, our knowledge of its societal implication is much less developed” (p. 433).

Human rights / progressive education / “growth plus.” Ostensibly a human rights approach to education stands in contrast to a human capital paradigm. It does include specific attention to inclusion of traditionally marginalised groups (girls, ethnic minorities, disabled, etc.). It aims to facilitate meaningful participation by a larger population. However, while proclaiming that everyone should have “it” (education), in practice the human rights approach pays insufficient attention to the nature of that education. This approach still tends to equip people to compete (economically and socially) on terms set by the neoliberal paradigm.

In fact, analysis of the quintessential globalised form of the human rights view, EFA/MDG, suggests that in current practice this contender shares similar shortcoming with the
human capital perspective. Implementation of EFA guidelines is based on liberal governance assumptions about capable states: that is, states with a high level of political commitment, powerful democratic processes, and a middle class to hold actors accountable (Pak et al., 2007, p. 19). However, in many low-income nations, these conditions do not exist.

Moreover, as Goldstein (2004) cogently points out, the MDGs’ predefined standards and solutions are not always appropriate for the needs of a community as it was to some extent a Western-steered exercise that imposes a specific set of values on developing nations. Also, instead of integrating activities in one single approach, each initiative is operating alone. For example, to reach education goals, many projects provide pre-packaged mass education, which in view of financial shortfalls are inadequate to create a sufficient critical mass for change/development, let alone result in sufficient literacy levels. Whether the pre-packaged development solution really leads to “development” or whether it brings about some undesirable effect, such as rural exodus and disempowering of local communities, has often not even been investigated.

Post-developmentalism / “social transformation.” Post-developmental or social transformational goals for education are fundamentally different from the previous two paradigms. Here, education is regarded as intrinsically valuable, not linked to instrumental terms of investment and return. Education under this paradigm must be contextualised and localised, allowing for (celebrating) diversity; and it would likely include religious education as defined by Spring (2009). Issues of identity and cultural preservation are central to a transformationalist approach. It is also an essentially democratic conceptualisation of education. Given these general contours, it is possible to anticipate several practical limitations of a post-developmentalist approach to education.
One obvious limitation is the financial requirements and logistical difficulty of working with multiple languages (materials production, teacher training, etc.). Second, there is a danger that an emphasis on promotion of (micro)cultural identity could cause ethnic fragmentation and undermine national cohesion. A third potential difficulty arises from cultural variance: in cultures where boys are more valued than girls it is arguable that without some sort of international standards and monitoring, girls would attend school under this paradigm. This approach also requires extensive participation by a greater number of (local) stakeholders, and may be difficult to implement where there is little history of civil society. And finally, it requires a high degree and widespread availability of technical competence which is not often the case in developing nations.

**Gender and Education – A Global Agenda**

Gender equality in education is a prominent theme of the current global agenda for education, as evidenced and popularised in the goals of EFA and MDG. This has not always been the case, though females as a particular population have long been in focus.” Vaughan (2010) deftly illustrates this in her exploration of the treatment of girls’ and women’s education within UNESCO and the World Bank during the period 1945-2000. Definitions of both “gender” and “equality” have been dynamic, and continue to shift to accommodate evolving understanding of both as social constructions, rather than inviolable facts, and as a result of appreciation for the different forms of discrimination faced by females around the world.

This section first briefly traces the philosophical evolution of attention to gender and education through the lens of international development and then gives considerable attention to the current global mechanisms by which female education is being promoted. I demonstrate growing recognition that both of these campaigns short-change women, and that attention is
starting to move beyond a simplistic access approach to incorporate quality and educational outcome issues. Next comes a brief treatment of global parameters of research focus on gender and education. The chapter concludes by outlining the contemporary situation for female education in Cambodia.

**Historical evolution of an ideal**

Approaches to education for females have clearly been influenced by the wider worlds of international development priorities and evolution of thought in the feminist agenda (such as a move to understanding gender as a socially-constructed category rather than purely a biological one) (Arnot & Fennell, 2008). Rationale within the development field for the purpose of educating females has shifted between largely instrumental reasons (efficiency and economic growth aims: as in, how women can contribute to national economic growth through their reproductive roles) to an intrinsic equality agenda based on more liberal approaches concerned with removing structural barriers to education. This liberal bias is also reflected in the capabilities approach aimed at facilitating freedom to enable people to achieve what they consider valuable for themselves (Unterhalter 2007, 2008 as cited in Vaughan, 2010, p. 406). The material outworking of these different underlying principles and philosophies may appear similar (promoting girls to school); however, as the analyses and motivations differ, so too diverge the nature and extent of the results which more or less radical proponents desire.

**Mobilising to educate everyone**

Promoting education for females is a goal nearly impossible to argue with, and indeed, despite vastly differing philosophical rationale, nearly every nation on earth has been paying attention to doing just that for the past three decades. Attended by representatives of 155
nations, the 1990 World Conference on Education for All set six targets for achievement by 2015, and these were couched essentially in terms of human rights with a glance toward human flourishing.

As per the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, conference discussions were anchored by the principle of the right of all children, young people and adults to education, and the recognition that urgent action needed to be taken to address the growing number of out-of-school children worldwide. An expanded concept of basic education was agreed upon that encompassed not only knowledge and skills but also the importance of culture and…finding ways in which people can live together in peace. (UNICEF, 2009a, p. 11)

These aims contained a single specific reference to females: the fourth target of reducing adult illiteracy rates was supposed to put “sufficient emphasis on female literacy” (p. 11). The EFA Assessment 2000 conducted a decade later revealed that high numbers of children and adults continued to be denied their right to education, and that this exclusion affected mostly women and girls. At this time it also became apparent that educational quality was insufficient. The ensuing Dakar Framework for Action thus focused on “addressing persisting gender disparities and inequalities and reaching what UNESCO has termed “the unreached.” Accordingly, three of the six EFA goals set in Dakar in 2000 specifically mention females (p. 12).

Goal 2, aimed at promoting “complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality, specifies “all children, particularly girls…”;
Goal 4 on adult literacy specifies “especially for women”; and

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4 As defined by UNESCO the unreached “constitutes the last percentages of the population who have either been historically and culturally excluded, or have been pushed to difficult circumstances due to recent economic and political trends….The unreached include learners from remote and rural communities, religious, linguistic and ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples. They also include girls and women especially those from rural and ethnic minorities; as well as underperforming boys, boys at risk of dropping out or those male dropouts. Significantly, the unreached population groups also represent children and youth from migrant families, refugees, stateless individuals, nomadic people; learners with disabilities and special needs; working children, street children, trafficked/abused children; people in difficult circumstances and affected by armed conflict and disaster; orphans and abandoned children; learners from very poor families; people affected or infected by HIV and AIDS and so on.” Retrieved May 16, 2012, http://www.seameo.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=308&Itemid=27
Goal 5 to eliminate gender disparities at primary and secondary level is to be done “with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.”

In addition to gender being highlighted in EFA goals, two of the eight MDG goals specifically mention females (Goal 3, Promote gender equality and empower women; Goal 5, Improve maternal health). Three indicators within the eight Goals overtly reference females.

- Target 1.B: Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people.
- Target 2.A: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.
- Target 3.A: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

Perhaps the most distressing, and revealing, element of the MDG framework in regard to gender and equality is that the only MDG solely dedicated to improving equality for women (Goal 3) has a single indicator, and this exclusively measures “gender parity” in formal education (North, 2010). This is despite the fact that the official description of the need for this goal includes reference to employment issues (globally, because males exceed females in the formal (more secure) sector, in top-level jobs, and women are “largely relegated to more vulnerable forms of employment”) and a reference to political power (because women remain under-represented in the formal political sector and shifts in representation depend upon quotas and other special measures). The reduction of the objective for gender equality and women’s empowerment to numbers of males/females in school is a travesty, representing a highly truncated global vision for genuine gender equality. And it is a tragedy that despite this minimalist reductionism, the world will not achieve by 2015 even the simplistic aim of gender parity in school.

Despite the attention, or perhaps because of the nature of this attention given to getting girls to school, globally education is still characterised by extensive gender inequalities:
At a time of enormously expanded access to all levels of education, of high aspirations for political participation and huge growth of knowledge economics, 77 million children are still out of school, 57 per cent of whom are girls (UNESCO 2006:30). Seven-hundred and eighty-one million adults are illiterate and 64 per cent of these are women (UNESCO 2006:59). Nearly one billion people, one-sixth of the world’s population, have little or no education, either because they have never been to school or have had less than five years of schooling and left before acquiring key areas of knowledge and many useful skills. Two-thirds of these people are women and girls (Unterhalter 2007, p. 155). (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2007, p. 2)

**Moving beyond access**

Contention of this myopic vision of gender equality as merely gender parity is increasingly evident among proponents and practitioners (multilateral agencies, international finance institutes, and NGOs), as well as in the academic literature that now calls for moving “beyond access” (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2007). Building on conceptual work done as preparation for UNESCO’s EFA Global Monitoring Report in 2003/2004 (Wilson, 2003), Subrahmanian explains:

Achieving gender parity is just one step towards gender equality in and through education. An education system with equal numbers of boys and girls participating, who may progress evenly through the system, may not in fact be based on gender equality. A consideration of gender quality in education therefore needs to be understood as the right to education (access and participation), as well as rights within education (gender-aware educational environments, processes, and outcomes), and rights through education (meaningful education outcomes that link education equality with wider processes of gender justice) (Subrahmanian, 2003, p. 2).

Pressure is growing to extend the narrow preoccupation with access and move toward transforming gender relations within educational institutions, an aim which “requires substantial sustained transformation of gender relations within families, communities, and in society as a whole” (Arnot & Fennell, 2009, p. 515).

The first component of this rubric of gender equality (to/within/through education) is well documented in the UN Global Monitoring reports and other international mechanisms.
The second component (*gender equality within*) is increasingly addressed, though often implicitly, in the exploration of educational experiences in the global South (as well as global North). For instance, there is lot of discussion around school as both a gendered and actively gendering environment. Some recent examples include addressing teacher identity formation in Ghana (Casely-Hayford, 2008), student identity formation in Malawi (Kamwendo, 2010), curricular bias in favour of males (Marshall & Arnot, 2008), achievement differences between girls and boys in the Caribbean (Kutnick, Jules & Layne, 1997), and classrooms as locus of promotion of hegemonic views of masculine and feminine behaviour (Keddie, 2006).

The third element of *gender equality through education* refers to the outcome or results as expressed in livelihood, lifestyle, and employment. It is the least addressed of these three constituent parts (Arnot & Fennell, 2008). Nussbaum (2003) is one of the few making this explicit linkage. She is also one of the very few authors extolling the intrinsic value of education, and its intangible benefits which include self-confidence and increased social status.

**Research about gender and education**

Much research about gender and education before 2000 was preoccupied with identifying economic and logistical factors affecting girls’ participation in education (getting to, and staying in, school). Commonly identified generic barriers to educating girls include a) family poverty; b) weak legal frameworks around education; c) cultural and social norms; d) issues of safety and security around school affecting girls; and e) lack of relevance of school to the lives of children and especially girls. Gradually attention shifted to include more centrally the socio-cultural dimensions affecting female participation (Stephens, 2000), for instance, what happens within a classroom that may adversely affect female students. To some extent,
these three thematic emphases (economic, physical, and cultural) persist, at least in research
done in/about the global South (Connell, 2010).

In contrast, Connell observes that research in education in the global North is strongly
influenced by deconstructionism and a focus on identity issues. The line is not inviolable as
especially more recent research demonstrates. For instance, Chan (2011) examines concepts of
feminisation/masculinisation of primary teaching among school principles in Hong Kong; Luk-
Fong (2010) explores Chinese women primary school teachers’ changing femininities in the
same country; and Kamwendo (2010) looks at the construction of Malawian boys and girls on
gender and achievement.

Currently, three particular research trends are evident. The first addresses the inquiry
effort itself, through calls for “decentring hegemonic gender theory” (Fennell & Arnot, 2008,
p. 525), “resisting dominant discourse” (Chilisa & Ntseane, 2010, p. 617), and troubling
Western representation of Third World Women in popular cultural texts (including school
textbooks) (Sensoy & Marshall, 2010). In other words, theorists from the Global South are
asserting the need to use alternative lenses (e.g. indigenous, African feminist) for
understanding gender as it occurs in that region of the world. One of the ironies is that those
who would challenge Western hegemonic influences tend to set up their own particular
location as solitary reference for an alternate perspective. It is not unusual to see South Asian
(Indian, Bangladeshi), and South African writers represented as “Asian” or “African” voice/s.
To state this obvious paradox is not to question the critical need for alternative perspectives
and analytical frameworks, as much as to underscore the problem that perspectives from only a
very small number of countries are represented in the English-language literature which
dominates the field of gender and development studies and to emphasise the need for greater
interaction between Western and non-Western research (Arnot & Fennell, 2008). The invitation to pay closer attention to contextual circumstances has long been extended by comparative education, and is surfacing now in relation to gender and education. Silfver (2010) for instance, suggests that the Swedish government’s application of gender mainstreaming in education reform in Lao PDR may be a neo-colonial rather than emancipatory tool, and at best is simply ineffective, as it is based on Swedish understanding and history of gender relations rather than accounting for specific contextual factors of status, ethnicity, and kinship which are vital in the Lao setting.

Second, the need to focus on particular cases (such as different countries, and different policy constellations than are currently popular) and local outworking, remains a long-standing suggestion, bolstered more recently by the demands of poststructuralists for celebration of infinite difference. And a third new trend is the call for merging development studies and gender studies around the “gender and education” question, and for feminist activists and educators to do more together to advance their common cause (Fennel & Arnot, 2008).

In summary, it is clear that gender is firmly included in the cast favoured by the global agenda for education; very few would venture to suggest that educating girls is not important. However, views on rationale differ significantly. At one end are those arguing from a human capital standpoint about the economic waste incurred by not equally educating more than half the population; at the other end are proponents of the intrinsic value of education for self-development. Furthermore, understanding of what gender is, and attendant conceptualisations of how best to address related issues has also been actively evolving since the advent of the UN in the mid-1940s. As the following case study from Cambodia illustrates, there is still a very
long distance between theoretical considerations and support for girls’ education, and the
rality of educating girls in low income nations.

**Charting Transnational Influence on Cambodian Education**

Educational policy in Cambodia resides at the nexus of four main types of external
influence. These are globalisation (formal and informal), regional constructs (e.g. ASEAN
regional bloc; geo-political location), educational trends and discourse promoted for
industrialised nations (epitomised by OECD mandates), and international development (in the
form of input by transnational, multilateral, bilateral, and non-government agencies). This
relationship is demonstrated below in Figure 1. The notion of “convergence” is critical to
understanding policy development. Even if global, regional, international education idea(l)s
arrive in pristine condition, they quickly bump up against a myriad of existing influences and
their attractiveness or perceived merit is thus altered, and their meaning thereby mediated.

Each type of influence has multiple strands. For instance, ASEAN has economic,
social, and educational components: clearly, the bloc’s economic agenda will have an impact
on the explicit education agenda it promotes (such as standardisation of curricula to facilitate
movement of workers between the ten member countries). But ASEAN also has a more subtle
influence such as generating immediate demand for training in particular subjects or sectors
(English language or dentistry) that will equip workers for employment possibilities and
opportunities to eventually surface when Regional Economic Integration officially occurs.

The concept of “(in)formality” is also crucial for understanding how international
education policy is understood and negotiated. It is difficult to measure and quantify the
influence of informal factors, such as ICT, which grow and spread far beyond the control of
any government ministry and are widely available to its constituency. But those factors are
nonetheless very real and immediate in their impact on who wants to learn what, and how and why; on the interest and attention of students in a rural vs. urban classroom; and on the aspirations of government officials for their nation or indeed, their own children.

In sum, decisions to accept or reject education policies or themes on offer do not occur in a vacuum but in the very complex world of global, regional, national push and shove. While the international aid apparatus is a significant actor, and wields tremendous influence on LIC policies, it is certainly not the only actor on an increasingly crowded stage. A more detailed, though necessarily partial, description of how factors nested in each of these various levels of “the global” might affect the educational enterprise in Cambodia is included in Appendix 1.

Figure 1: Converging influences of the global on the local
Globalised Educational Discourses in Primary Education in Cambodia

This research asserts that language and concepts popularised by a global aid community directly influence Cambodian education. This section first defines “discourse” then demonstrates that many of the major global discourses have been incorporated into Cambodia education policy and to a lesser extent, practice. It concludes by providing examples of how at the central level, the MoEYS has responded to these foreign influences. In some cases, the government actively ignores global rhetoric. In other cases, it overtly resists by nationally mandated changes in practice. And there are many ways in which exogenous concepts and policies are tacitly resisted.

Defining “discourse”

“Discourse” in an academic sense has come to refer to the use of “language as a cultural tool that mediates relationships of power and privilege in social interactions, institutions, and bodies of knowledge” (Rogers, Malanchuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui & Joseph, 2005, p. 367), and highlights awareness that there is often a [subtle] ideological dimension to the public representation of aspirations or reality. The notion of “discourse” is predicated on the belief that language is not neutral because it both conveys and constrains human thought and, thereby, action. Discourse is conveyed not only through written or spoken word, but also through media images, implicit appeal to historical events, and use of allegorical language.

It is possible to envision concentric circles of discourse which are self-referential and mutually-reinforcing. For instance, “development discourse,” relating as it does to low-income countries, has its own particular discourse about education (Robinson-Pant, 2001), which is quite different from the educational norms promoted by the European Union for its own member states. It is also possible to envision a situation where two (or more) major discourses
are fundamentally contradictory but, for political expediency, are (both) promoted: for instance, a human capital vs. human rights rationale. Or instances where rhetoric about quality ends up actually being implemented as construction of additional infrastructure, and thus measured quantitatively.

In this section then, the term discourse is used to refer to major themes evidenced at multiple levels of implementation. In Cambodia, for example, at the central level, the RGC’s espoused aim of education is to equip citizens to contribute to national integration into the regional and global economy (a neoliberal “human capital discourse”). The Law on Education (2007) makes this very plain:

The state shall promote and support research, development, invention and production, which are scientific and technological for education to meet the needs of the labour markets and globalization to promote human resource capacity and to enhance the development of the country (Article 28, paragraph 1).

Thus there is a clear focus on functional literacy and numeracy, and increasingly evident, a move to offer vocational and technical training and life-skills as an alternative to an academic track. And at the Ministry level, policy and implementation focus is increasingly on “inclusiveness” (the current push is for inclusion of children with physical disabilities) which is in synch with a “human rights discourse.”

Some educational reform originally intended to be interim solutions to perceived crises has become institutionalised and had adverse effects over the long-term. For example, measures to address chronic teacher shortages in Cambodia have included contract teachers, fast-track training for indigenous ethnic minority teachers, organising double-shifts, pay reallocation allowance for teaching in remote locations, and most recently – promoting multi-grade classroom instruction. All but contract teaching are still practiced. As an example of adverse impact, the double-shift system has solidified into a permanent feature and leaves
Cambodian children with much less instructional time than is the global average (UNICEF & World Bank, 2006, p. 39).

**Educational discourse for low-income countries**

The global EFA agenda, and subsequently the global MDG agenda, represent the clearest and most straight-forward statement of globalised discourse for education in low-income countries. Both of these campaigns are rooted in economistic “human capital” discourse (which regards education as a way to develop a workforce, and subsequently, a national economy), though with an overlay of “human rights” rhetoric. They promote universal primary education (because this represents the largest return on investment for any level of education), educating females (again, because of the return on investment), and collaborative private/community participation (as this reduces cost to government).

There is little from the global educational discourse on primary education as espoused by the western development aid community of bilateral, multilateral, and NGO donors, that is not reflected in official policy documents in Cambodia. Some of the major themes in that discourse are clearly displayed by the Global EFA Monitoring Report themes: gender (2003/4), quality (2005), literacy (2006), early childhood (2007), governance (2009), marginalisation (2010), conflict (2011), and skills development (2012). In response to most of these issues, MoEYS has developed policies or otherwise incorporated attention into its strategic planning documents. Additional popular concepts promoted on the global education stage which Cambodia is currently actively engaging with include child-centred learning, inclusive education (promoting inclusion of children with physical disabilities into public schools), early childhood education and care in the form of school readiness programs, lifeskills instruction, and promotion of English as [the] foreign language in primary school.
Some, such as Tan (2010) would contend that, in actual fact, Cambodia (and LICs more generally) has no choice about whether or not it will adopt policies suggested by donor governments and multilateral agencies; that it is forced, or compelled, to accept foreign ideas by virtue of its poverty and the largesse of foreign agents. Clearly, though, the Cambodian government does not feel compelled to quietly acquiesce with all foreign policy and direction initiatives. It is not afraid to “push back” when it sees that its own interests may be violated by acceptance of foreign norms. An excellent example of this is the RGC’s protracted negotiation with donors over the “Khmer Rouge Tribunal,” the commonly used name of what is officially titled the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), a process that continued until Cambodia’s conditions were met for establishing it as a national (rather than international) court involving local judges (as well as international judges) and paid for almost entirely by foreign donations (Heder, 2002; McGrew, 2009). Another example is the Cambodian Prime Minister’s frequent public castigation of two consecutive Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for human rights in Cambodia (Mr. Yash Ghai for 2005-2008 and Mr. Peter Leuprecht for the prior period of 2000-2005) for their outspoken criticism of land grabbing by high-level officials, the government’s granting of land concessions to large corporations (Chinese, French, Korean, Australian), illegal eviction of thousands of urban poor in Phnom Penh, and a generally deteriorating human rights situation. Three more examples of national-level resistance and contestation of international policy norms are detailed below in the section with that title (see page 87).

While the government does ostensibly entertain numerous foreign ideas and actually does incorporate many into policy documents, evidence of implementation is often not easily observable. Therefore, to understand whether or not global norms are actually being taken up
in Cambodia, it is important to look more deeply than policy, and observe practice, in order to ascertain what is actually done with the rhetoric.

**Hard to reach populations.** The notion of “hard to reach populations,” alternatively referred to as “unreached” (used by UNICEF and UNESCO) or “underserved populations” (the term favoured by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), a major bilateral donor for education in LICs; see American Institutes for Research, 2008) has recently achieved some currency among education specialists at the global level. This term refers to “children from poor, rural, and remote areas and ethnic minority groups” (Badloe et al., 2007, p. v), a population characterised by more than simply income poverty, including factors “such as ethnicity, geographic location, gender, and disability among others” (p. 1). Notably, women and girls are the most marginalised people within every category included under this term; thus this concept is inextricably linked to gender. In Cambodia, UNESCO has historically supported non-formal (literacy) education for minorities while UNICEF tends to support the formal system.

Relative to its neighbours, Cambodia has a homogenous population. Of the country’s estimated 13.4 million population (RGC-NIS, 2010; the CIA Fact Book estimates the population in 2012 stands at 14.9 million), roughly 90 percent belong to the majority Khmer ethnic group, five percent are Vietnamese, four percent ‘other’, and one percent Chinese (CIA Fact Book, 2012). The category of “other” contains about a million people, including indigenous ethnic minority groups. Estimates of the number of distinct groups range from 20 (Blench, 2002 cited in Chap, The & Thomas, 2003) to 36 (World Bank, 2005b, p. 74), with the former figure most commonly quoted. Among these, Cham are the most populous (~350,000). In two provinces minority groups form the majority population: a mix of Brao, Kreung, Kavet,
and Tampuan comprise about 85 percent of the population in Ratanakiri province and the Bunong people in Mondulkiri make up about 75 percent of that province’s population. The Khmer majority used to commonly refer to indigenous ethnic minorities as Khmer L’eur or “Khmer highlanders,” a term popularised during the Sihanouk era to unify the country and foster national identity. Indeed, many reside in mountainous highland areas of Ratanakiri, Mondulkiri, Stung Treng, and Kratie Provinces (an exception is the Kui in Prey Vihear). The term chuncheat is now more commonly used.

Generally, indigenous ethnic minority people in Cambodia have difficulty accessing basic services and the formal economy largely because of their limited ability with the majority national language of Khmer, because of discriminatory attitudes held by many Khmer about minority people, and because they tend to live in remote locations with limited infrastructure. This is certainly true for education. Non-formal literacy education for adults in mother tongue has been implemented by three small international NGOs since 1998 in Ratanakiri (International Cooperation Cambodia - ICC*, Non-Timber Forest Products - NTFP), Mondulkiri (ICC), and Stung Treng (YWAM) provinces. Before such work could start, it was necessary to create a writing system for these previously unwritten languages. The RGC required the INGO responsible for orthography development to use Khmer script as the basis for all indigenous language orthographies (though at least three – Bunong, Jarai, and Kui were already available, the first two in Vietnamese script and the third in Thai script) and to obtain official permission for the final product to ensure that it did not deviate too significantly from Khmer script. Where new orthographies differ, MoEYS demanded detailed explanation and retained the right to reject the technical explanation and supply its own forms.
Although three years of basic education in a group’s mother tongue are guaranteed in the 2007 Education Law, the RGC has neither sustained political will nor technical/financial resources to make this a reality. MoEYS’s intentional efforts to reach minorities with formal education include: providing scholarships for children from remote areas, lowering the minimum requirements for people from remote locations for entrance to the Teacher Training College (nine rather than 12 years), and authorising a pilot project by the agency CARE International (Highland Children’s Education Project (HCEP) in 2001) to conduct primary school for indigenous ethnic minority children using their mother tongue for three years, gradually phasing in Khmer language until the children are mainstreamed into Khmer public school in their fourth year. A similar pilot commenced with the Bunong in Mondolkiri in 2003. After the successful pilot in Ratanakiri, the MoEYS reduced to one year from three, the time allowed for mother tongue to dominate as the medium for instruction. Recently, the RGC denied approval for the Kui orthography developed by ICC. Thus, high-level, public support by government officials has given way to practical decisions that impede learning and contravene basic human rights.

Education statistics for remote and poor areas, taken as a proxy for information about indigenous ethnic minority populations, consolidates the rather dismal reality for indigenous people in Cambodia. Where the national literacy rate is around 67 percent, for remote Ratanakiri province it is just 23 percent (World Bank, 2005b, p. 74). Among ethnic minorities nation-wide the literacy rate is a mere 23 percent (p. 74). The gender gap for literacy is also greater among minorities – female literacy rates for minorities is about 17 percent against a national literacy rate of 55 percent for females (p. 74). Primary school enrolment rates are seven percent lower than the national average and repetition rates run five percent higher than
the national average (Badloe et al., 2007, p. 5). In the six provinces where most indigenous ethnic minority people live, 85 percent of all schools are classified as “incomplete”\(^5\) while the national average is 36 percent (p. 10). The pupil-teacher ratio in remote locations averages 67, compared to the national figure of 54 (World Bank, 2005b, p. 74). While the national proportion of primary school teachers with only primary education themselves is seven percent, it jumps to 55 percent in remote areas (Badloe et al., 2007, p. 14).

As a final note, an even more egregious violation of human rights for minorities in Cambodia is that the RGC now requires all citizens to declare their nationality as “Khmer” and will not recognise declarations of any other ethnicity (KAPE, 2007b, p. 4-5). This was the government’s response to observations from external observers that the State Party’s Law on Nationality (1996) could result in discrimination against children of non-Khmer ethnic origin and thus be a contravention of UN-CRC’s Article 7. This is yet another example of a situation where the RGC complies at the policy level with international trends and norms, but where on-the-ground implementation is the point of strong contestation and even rejection.

**Community participation: Neoliberalism in disguise?** Community participation appears to be a popular as well as a desirable aim for the education sector in many low-income countries, including Cambodia, because it “can help spread the burden of resourcing, and [communities] can increase the volume, relevance and impact of education” (Bray, 2003, p. 41). All these rationale have been cited in educational reform efforts in Cambodia. In the past two decades, and particularly since 2000, space for community involvement in multiple sectors has (theoretically) been expanded through various reforms initiatives and projects, many of them related directly to the national policy of decentralisation.

\(^5\) An incomplete school is defined by the MoEYS as one where not all six grades of primary education are available because of a dearth of classrooms or teachers.
Clearly, decentralisation efforts create such spaces by downloading responsibilities to commune councils and other actors directly affected by the “action” (Turner, 2002). Decentralisation is, of course, not limited to education or to Cambodia, but is a general trend promoted by the World Bank (and increasingly, other multilateral and non-governmental agencies) across many sectors in low-income countries.

Cambodia has many examples of education-specific policies and reforms that include a community participation component and NGOs are also creatively seeking ways to facilitate greater community participation in education (Bunlay et al., 2010; Chansopheak, 2009; Chhin & Dy, 2009). For example, the Cluster School model, implemented by MoEYS since 2000, declares itself to be an “open and democratic forum [that] allows also a deeper involvement of communities as important a party as teacher and school principles” (MOEYS, 2000 as cited in Pellini, 2007, p. 138). The World Bank funded Education Quality Improvement Project (EQIP), specifically aimed at quality improvement, “tried to encourage local level innovative activities and supported decision making processes at school level that involved community representatives” (Pellini, 2007, p. 85) and also attempted to increase accountability by providing funds directly to planners at the local level. In practice, parents were more involved with the logistical arrangements for the school-feeding included in some EQUP locations, than in any other elements of the project (Pellini, 2007, p. 86).

Local committees are often formed by NGOs for the purpose of administering scholarship programmes, a popular mechanism for addressing especially girls’ access to lower and upper secondary school (Schady & Filmer, 2008). However, these scholarship initiatives
are “pre-packaged” and must be implemented according to criteria determined by external agencies rather than based on local input and genuine dialogue around perceptions of poverty.

In many countries, Cambodia included, school support committees (SSC) have long been part of government efforts to engage parents and the wider community in education (Shoraku, 2008b):

In order to guarantee school autonomy and establish a close link among all the educational actors at the school level, every primary school is now intended to have a School Support Committee (SSC). The responsibilities of the committee are wide-ranging: it stimulates the schooling of children, especially girls and disadvantaged children; it motivates parents to enrol their children in school; it prevents pupil repetition and dropout; it establishes a pro-education community environment; and it tries to make the school development plan pertinent to children’s basic learning needs. (MoEYS 2002, cited in Shoraku, 2008b, p. 10)

Increasingly, community involvement is targeted as a mechanism of accountability, as exemplified in the World Bank’s Priority Action Plan (PAP) initiative (Chhin & Dy, 2009; Shoraku, 2008a). PAP was designed to more directly involve schools (and communities to a lesser extent) in budget management and in some ways could be considered a success. Though there were “delays” in funding (just 46 percent of funds for 2002 were actually released) there has been relatively low leakage of the money which did flow, attributed to the fact that schools know how much they are supposed to get and there is a perceived sense that inspections and audits are rigorous so people do not try to skim (Pellini, 2007, p. 89). However, according to Pellini’s findings, PAP has been less successful with motivating participation among other stakeholders. MoEYS reported that while 60-80 percent of parents had heard about the abolition of school registration fees, only 20 percent had been aware of the school committee’s role and plans; and just 10 percent of parents reported having received any information about school spending, only nine percent had ever heard of PAP, and none knew any details (p. 90).
One of the main goals of Cambodia’s national Education For All Plan (2003-2015) is to establish EFA Committees (EFAC) at the local and national levels, with the aim of devolving planning closer to the point of implementation. To this end, Commune Councils have been tasked with taking an on-going role in “monitoring equity and quality issues affecting…both formal and non-formal [education] (MoEYS, 2002, p. 18). Thus, despite very strong and active language about participation, in practice, EFA committees and activities do not actually include wide representation or action from communities or parents.

The final example of policy-directed community participation for mention here is MoEYS’s Child-friendly Schools Policy. One of the policy’s six aims is devoted solely to community involvement. Entitled, “Schools involving students, families, and community members”, this goal reads:

Create opportunities for them to participate in school decision-making and to be part of the support system for children’s learning. Activities that increase school’s openness to community participation include: Open invitation to parents and community members to regularly visit the school and take part in school activities. - Increase parental engagement to support children’s learning at home. And -Establish student associations and interest clubs. (MoEYS, 2006)

Resistance and contestation at national level

Though there are many ways in which Cambodia is complying with the international aid community’s agenda for educational reform, there are also several ways in which it is resisting or contesting international norms. Three examples are provided here: 1) Cambodia’s response to the concept of education for sustainable development (ESD), 2) shifting models of formal literacy instruction, and 3) community participation.

Taking exception through intentional ignorance. One glaring exception to Cambodia’s generally amicable receipt of globalised priorities is “education for sustainable
development.” ESD is loosely defined by its originators based on the Brundtland Commission’s classic definition:

“The sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 43).

Sustainable development is generally thought to have three components: environment, society, and economy. The well-being of these three areas is intertwined, not separate. For example, a healthy, prosperous society relies on a healthy environment to provide food and resources, safe drinking water, and clean air for its citizens. The sustainability paradigm rejects the contention that casualties in the environmental and social realms are inevitable and acceptable consequences of economic development. Thus, the authors consider sustainability to be a paradigm for thinking about a future in which environmental, societal, and economic considerations are balanced in the pursuit of development and improved quality of life. (UNESCO, 2006, p. 10)

A recent UNESCO report (2010) suggests that officials in the education sector are just beginning to pay attention to ESD as a concept. However, their optimistic description of what form this has so far taken is illustrative of the Khmer capacity to focus on appearance rather than substance, on absorbing terminology without altering implementation:

Currently, there is the national ESD focal point located at the Royal Academy of Cambodia. While the national ESD Steering Committee is [yet] to be established, there are a number of on-the-ground ESD related activities going on, though not labelled as “ESD”. In education, the NIE [National Institute of Education] has been providing ESD trainings (including world heritage education) to the students who will become upper-secondary school teachers upon graduation. These potential teachers are taught the concepts and skills of integrating ESD into teaching their subjects.

To integrate ESD across the education sector, the MoEYS has appointed an ESD focal point in the MoEYS to coordinate the ESD integration into the education sector wide planning.

Cambodia is in its initial stages of ESD. The major challenges include the establishment of a National ESD Steering Committee, and the integration of the ESD concept into the entire education system. (UNESCO, 2010a, p. 30)

The RGC’s unapologetically economistic aim for its formal education system is “human capital development to enable integration into the regional and global economy.”

Nowhere in any policy or guideline documents is there attention to the concept of ESD, though
as a concession to global environmental concerns, primary school Social Studies textbooks do include 2-3 lessons about the negative impact of habitat destruction on humankind’s quality of life. Other major threads in the tapestry of global discourse around education in LICs, which Cambodia is so far not engaging on, include: lifelong learning, debate about the extent of indigenisation of curricula and assessment methods, and knowledge-based vs. inquiry-based learning systems. It is possible to interpret these omissions as intentional, in keeping with the Cambodian government’s strong rhetoric about the desirability of modernisation, and its singular [neoliberal] economistic perspective.

**An example of overt resistance: learning to read.** MoEYS initially succumbed to, but is lately resisting, global pressure (communicated as “conventional wisdom”) for continued use of the “whole language” approach to teaching literacy. Called *method globale* within the MoEYS, this system was adopted in 1996 upon introduction by “specialists from Thailand and Philippines” (I-A86). Starting with the 2012-2013 academic year, this is to be replaced by the *Chyke Chyme* [phonetics] method. Named for its author, *Chyk Chyme* was the dominant method of teaching literacy throughout the Sihanouk era. Ostensibly, the rationale for switching approaches to literacy is the World Bank school achievement results which demonstrated very low rates of literacy, numeracy, and basic conceptual skills. Ironically, the WB’s findings are now being used by the MoEYS as incontrovertible evidence that “foreign ideas do not work in Cambodia” and by international donors as indication that local education is “too local” and insufficiently “internationalised.”

One MoEYS official described the three different models currently in use (*method globale*, mixed method, *Chyke Chyme*) and then concluded, “I don’t know why teachers complain.

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6 Throughout this document, for primary data the designation “I-” refers to interview, “G-” refers to group discussion, and “O-” refers to observation notes.
It is not the method [that works or doesn’t work], that is up to the teacher. They teach what they want. I make no comment [about which model is best]” (I-P39). However, despite this official’s laissez faire remark, clearly, the “foreign model” is actually being actively resisted.

**Getting girls to school in Cambodia: ambivalence as protest**

Despite the past two decades of serious effort, virtually unlimited technical assistance from the UN’s global Education For All initiative, and millions of foreign aid dollars aimed at improving the educational system and facilities in Cambodia, fewer than half the country’s girls complete a high-school education, and twice as many boys as girls attend upper secondary school. This stands in marked contrast to Cambodia’s neighbours: in 2006, the East Asia and Pacific regional net enrolment rate\(^7\) for girls in secondary school was 70 percent compared to 28 percent for Cambodian girls (UNESCO/IBE, 2011).

While there is laudable overall quantitative improvement (that is, more children overall attend and complete school), concerns are increasingly being expressed about the distinct disparity between male and female school attendance and achievement. That gap noticeably widens in favour of boys from grade four and continues through post-secondary levels. Furthermore, there is a significant gap in adult literacy rates, also strongly in favour of males with 47.6 percent of men and only 29.1 percent of women currently able to read fluently (CARE, 2008). Although educational access for every Cambodian is still an issue, where there are educational opportunities and financial resources available, apparently boys are preferred.

Perhaps due to the enormity of barriers that hinder any Cambodian’s effort to receive basic education in Cambodia, there is little academic literature available addressing the specific intersection of gender and education in Cambodia. Gender issues have historically been muted

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\(^7\) Net enrolment rate (NER) is defined as the number of pupils in the theoretical age group who are enrolled expressed as a percentage of the same population.
in favour of politically-oriented analysis. And poverty discourse is another focus in the literature that serves to obscure gender issues: often ill defined, poverty is invoked for failures of any and all kinds in Cambodia (moral, political, or social; personal, communal, or national).

There have been a mere five in-country studies focused on the issue of girls and education, the first in 1995 and the most recent in 2008. A handful of other reports and studies do make oblique reference to the absence of girls in the formal system but tend to reiterate conventional wisdom or simply refer to one of the five core studies. A close review of existing reports and studies generates a rather long and untidy list of reasons for girls’ absence that can be roughly divided into two categories of demand and supply. Demand-side reasons for low attendance are somewhat complicated and tend to be descriptive rather than analytical, but can be summarised as “poverty” and “cultural and social traditions.” This includes such things as: “housework” [girls are required to stay home], the need [for girls] to care for siblings, security concerns for girls walking to school (including rape and kidnapping), and parental attitudes toward boys/girls. Also “honour” and “proper behaviour” are reasons stated by parents for girls’ non-attendance (Fiske, 1995). To this list, teachers added that girls drop out of school due to early marriage, in order to engage in income-generating work, because they are not confident as students, and because school is not so important for girls since employment job opportunities are rarer for girls than boys (CARE-MoEYS, 1998).

Supply-side factors identified in the reports are often not gender-specific though presented that way. Physical barriers include poor access due to lack of school buildings; a dearth of complete schools in rural areas (that is, schools offering the full range of grades); lack of basic materials such as blackboards and textbooks; low teacher salaries which foster

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8 For instance, the CARE (1998) study found that a full 46 percent of respondents said they thought boys are more intelligent than girls, 61 percent said formal education is more important for boys than girls, and 83 percent said girls should do more housework than boys so this was a legitimate reason to keep them home from school.
corruption and make school unaffordable and negatively impact the quality of instruction; irrelevant curriculum (see Bray, 1999; Kamerman, 2002; Kusakabe, 2005). Quality constraints are identified as a need for pedagogical improvement, reliance on rote learning, and irrelevant curricula (Bredenberg & Sao, 2003; Geeves, et al., 2002), while lack of community participation is noted as a third supply-side constraint to female participation (Shoraku, 2006).

The CARE study’s attempt to look at gender-specific elements of software issues of the supply-side of the schooling equation concluded that girls are more often hindered than boys from attendance for three reasons. First, teacher attitudes toward children (teachers treat boys/girls differently, giving preferential treatment to boys; girls are asked to do domestic chores at the school while boys are not). Second, curriculum materials may not be gender-sensitive. And third, the curriculum may be perceived as irrelevant for a family’s/girl’s goals. Tellingly, the study concluded that expectations of both teachers and caregivers for child behaviour were concurrent with ancient traditional moral codes for conduct, such as the Chhap Srey, which are much more rigid for girls than for boys.

Gorman (1999) adds an important dimension to the conversation by expanding the horizon of consideration to include women’s disadvantaged position in accessing material and non-material resources of contemporary Cambodian society. Attending to the intersection of gender with education, health, and economy and labour, Gorman makes a compelling case that female disadvantage is caused by socially prescribed attitudes (and attendant behaviours) which accord women lower value than men. Traditionally, society in Cambodia is hierarchically ordered and notions of power and status condition all social relations. Women are [always] of lower status (read: have less power) than men, although status of an individual is determined by age and other characteristics including wealth. Thus traditional Khmer
cosmology contains very clearly defined expectations for roles, abilities, and behaviours of women and of men. These traditional perspectives are so strong and central to notions of Khmer identity (see also: Ebihara, Mortland & Ledgerwood, 1994; Edwards, 2008; Hansen & Ledgerwood, 2008; Ledgerwood, 1995) that to challenge the “gender inequalities inherent in gender relations is perceived as a challenge to the very core of Khmer social structure, and a threat to Khmer identity” (Gorman, 1999, p. 10).

Implications of this system of social organisation on schooling are obvious. Drawing on international research and applying it to Cambodia (rather than starting with the Cambodia situation), Gorman suggests that direct costs (financial expenditure) and opportunity costs are the major reason/s for girls’ absence/s. Why parents would consider direct costs too high for girls but not too high for boys clearly stems from the overriding social preference for males and strongly gendered perceptions about appropriate work for children. Parents have greater expectations of boys for income and earning potential resulting from formal education while a major benefit of education for girls is seen to be preparation to fulfill their roles as mothers and wives and manage a household.

Velasco’s 2001 report is useful primarily in that it contributes a significant amount of anecdotal evidence to support claims made in previous studies about parental rationale for their reluctance to invest in girls’ education. While it concludes similarly to other reports, and does little to contribute to development of an overall conceptual framework, the report does highlight a critical perspective previously lacking in related research. That perspective is well summarised in the study’s sub-title: perceptions, realities, and contradictions in changing Cambodia. Velasco notes that parents offer a verbal rationale for non-attendance of girls that

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9 One of the reports major findings, for instance, is that “Gender stereotyping and discrimination against girls within the family combined with poverty appear to be a major factor in discouraging girls and restricting their equal access to education.”
is sometimes at odds with their actual practice. The classic example is of parents who say that they fear for their daughters’ security because the distance of three kilometres to the school is too great; but who then send these same daughters to Phnom Penh a half-dozen provinces away, to work in garment factory to earn cash that will contribute to the family’s income.

Arensen (2007) suggests that such ambivalence is an integral part of Khmer identity and as such, will influence all major decisions including those relating to formal education: “…the Khmer fear they will sink. This fear is framed partly in terms of losing cultural identity but more concretely in terms of loss of morality…” (p.15). Indeed, the few explicit studies on gender and education in Cambodia suggest that “the gender gap is deeply rooted in cultural and social traditions” (Fiske, 1995, p. 7). A family’s decision is more likely to send a male rather than a female to school when forced (by whatever variable) to choose between them. All things being equal, education for boys is preferred to education for girls.

In summary, basic statistical evidence suggests that educational opportunities for girls in Cambodia are increasing and improving at all levels in the formal system. However, male bias remains strongly evident in all spheres of life including education. Progress for gender equality in education is slow and geographically inconsistent (it is still the case that very few ethnic minority women ever attend, much less complete, school); just a tiny fraction of higher education participants are women; and educational outcomes do not yet reflect wider attitudinal shifts in society toward genuine equality. International norms of gender equality may be enshrined in policy but they are largely rejected in daily social practice.

**Chapter Summary**

In many countries around the world, formal mass schooling is startling in its visible similarities. This chapter has provided an outline of various theories explaining why this is so,
and then added a discussion of global governance, and its humanitarian impulse of international development, identifying this international community as a major impetus behind education as it occurs in low-income nations. Three major philosophies that underlie attendant educational impulses, processes, and forms were identified as a focus on economic growth, human rights, and social justice. Gender equality, a major item on the global agenda for education was show-cased as an example of how perceptions about gender, and about education, have shifted over time and how this movement resulted in different sorts of action, but without having significant impact (at least in LICs) on women’s capability to benefit from opportunities formal education theoretically opens up. For gender and education as it occurs in Cambodia, rhetoric is laudable, but application lags far behind.

This chapter concludes with three specific examples of how some international educational norms are being contested and resisted at the national level. The case of Cambodia illustrates that while the perceived worldwide convergence of educational systems suggested by world culture and world systems theorists may be visible at policy level, and ostensible conformity occurs in some of the more visible manifestations of formal primary education (uniforms, girls to school, subjects, etc.), the reality of classroom implementation is a much more varied and colourful affair. At “ground level,” local stakeholders actively re-interpret globalised discourses in a way that leaves their education traditions and norms largely intact. Convergence as well hybrid enactment of global reforms and norms are to a significant extent the result of (conflicting) socio-cultural values. Among other examples, the result of conflicting values is very clearly evidenced in discussions with all stakeholders about gender and education.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

No stranger to exogenous influences during its two thousand year history, Cambodia is nevertheless currently experiencing encroachment of a new type and altogether different magnitude with an unprecedented onslaught of “foreign” cultural, social, and economic influences from global and regional sources. Accordingly, this research sought to understand the ways in which local communities negotiate transnational influences exhibited as a particular model of primary education. This exploratory research was conducted in the form of a critical ethnographic inquiry based on a theoretical montage that employed elements of three distinct but related research traditions: critical theory (CT), feminism, and postcolonialism.

Research occurred over an 18-month period in four phases: preparation, extended field stay, a period designated for translation and cultural checking with Khmer research assistants, and then analysis, writing-up, and member checking. The primary method of data collection included document analysis, semi-structured in-depth interviews, observation of life and formal education practice in a rural setting, and focus group discussions where participatory activities were employed to facilitate input from stakeholders. A major aim of this research was to enable the voices of people at the receiving end of a long chain of ostensible good will extending from the global to village level to be heard, as the views, opinions, and knowledge of this group are virtually excluded from academic and non-academic research. When included, most often this population of “end users” is evaluated for how well, or poorly, they are performing against imposed concepts. Special effort was made to solicit the voices of women associated with the school-in-focus, and to generate conversation around the concept of gender.

This chapter begins by briefly describing each of the three research traditions, locating their origins, then outlining contours of contemporary practice, and summarising common
critiques. This is followed by a brief summary of the commonalities and challenges shared by all three traditions; and an assessment of the potential limits and contributions of these traditions for this particular research endeavour. Then, this chapter outlines challenges unique to qualitative research. The next section looks at ways feminist, critical, and ethnographic perspectives have informed research for development in low-income countries generally, and primary education more specifically. Samples of research are included to illustrate ways these traditions have influenced mainstream and alternative research. The chapter concludes with a description and explanation of research design, including participants, research site, methods of data collection and analysis.

**Description of Three Research Traditions**

First, the research is “critical” in nature. That is, it attends to historical (political and other) forces to perceive social reality in terms of relations of power and control, oppression and resistance; and it regards empowerment and social justice to be the purpose of inquiry (Brookfield, 2005). Critical theory (CT) seeks not only to understand or explain social phenomenon, but also to critique and to change it. The research employed critical ethnographic techniques of prolonged presence in participants’ setting/s, extended observation, and contextual analysis to determine local meanings. Critical ethnography (CE) “has attachments to local knowledge and to illuminating the exercise of power in culturally specific…processes” (Lather, 2001, p. 479). Its aim “is to theorize social structural constraints and human agency, as well as the interrelationships between structure and agency in order to consider paths toward empowerment of the researched” (Gordon, Holland & Lahelma, 2001, p. 193).
Second, the research was scaffolded upon an intentionally feminist framework, both in terms of theory, as well as in the practical aspects of implementation. Feminist research recognises (multiple) power dynamics within the research setting, as well as the social context writ large, centralises participants’ knowledge, and values reciprocity between researcher and participants. Although this research is not only about females, it is aimed at working for and with girls and women because females are disadvantaged in nearly every social encounter in Cambodia, including education (Brickell, 2011; CAMBOW, 2007; Gorman, 1999; Kasumi, 2006; Kraynanski, 2007; Walsh, 2007). The researchers made special effort to speak with women and girls and gain their perspectives, as well as to provoke discussion with males and females, central authorities and village practitioners, around key issues of gender, and gender and education. Research included analysis of explicit and implicit gender-related messages embedded in curricular choices and textbook illustrations and text.

Third, the research took a postcolonial stance, a view which emphasises the necessity of troubling the “unconsciously ethnocentric” (dominant) discourses of (Western) imperialism, including “development,” because they are “profoundly insensitive to the meanings, values, and practices of other cultures” (McEwan, 2001). As a way to be true to a postcolonial view, this research prioritised subaltern voices, histories, and identities (rather than ignored; or worse, discounted or obliterated them) (Simon, 2006). This was done through an intentionally extended period of time living in a village and observing the educational enterprise from that angle, soliciting the voices of people in the village in reflecting on education and learning, and exploring traditional proverbs and metaphors. I conscientiously refrained from responding to frequent requests to offer advice (e.g. “tell us how to do it right,” and “I don’t know if right or wrong, so please correct me”) because my purpose was to attempt illumination of village level
activity and local reflection on why things occur as they do, rather than take the role of “foreign expert.”

These three research traditions share several key characteristics. All cohere with a critical/emancipatory/participatory worldview (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lather, 2006). All have an “historical realist” ontological disposition which understands individual reality to be shaped by various constructs (gender, social, political, cultural, economic) and socially prescribed values (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 193). All three traditions subscribe to a “transactional/subjectivist” epistemology (p. 193). Transactionalism holds that “truth” is in interaction, and thus that “reality” is the product of both the observer and the observed. Subjectivism refers to (an) individual(‘s) perception, feelings, frame of mind (see Carspecken, 1996, p. 20). Thus, they favour “dialogical/dialectical” methodologies (p. 20) that regard issues from multiple angles and aim for active, collaborative, co-construction of knowledge. That is, methods and methodologies which are essentially relational, dynamic, iterative. Another commonality shared by these traditions is their normative perspective. Normative in a philosophical sense relates to an idea standard or model and has embedded within it, a sense of how things “ought” to be. Often in the literature this “ought” is cast in terms of social justice, equality, and/or equity. In summary, it is on the basis of epistemological similarities and values convergence that these three traditions can be usefully combined into a single methodological framework.

**Critical research tradition**

Critical theory is both a practice (of theorising) and a product (of that theorising). It differs markedly from the positivist-empiricism in taking a constitutive view of theory, that is, regarding theory itself as making or producing the categories through which the world is experienced (Schwandt, 2007). CT is explicitly self-conscious in its continuous interrogation
of the “taken-for-granted character of the social world” (p. 55) and in active acknowledgement that its analytical models are creations, not objective facts (Herron & Reason, 1997). Furthermore, CT is a normative tradition of inquiry, viewing the purpose of research and interpretation (knowledge generation) as change or social transformation rather than as knowledge for the sake of understanding. The “why” emphasis of CT stands as a forceful critique of positivist science’s fixation with “how” (instrument rationality). The critical theory tradition regards theory and practice/action as integral and symbiotic, not as independent, a move sometimes called “praxis.” A third distinctive characteristic of CT is that it works from within particular constructs or categories, seeking to understand them on their own terms in order to reveal limitations, contradictions, and to (re)imagine possibilities (Kinchloe & McLaren, 2005; Nielsen, 1992; Schwandt, 2007).

Critical theory as a particular intellectual movement originated with the Frankfurt School of critical social theory. The Frankfurt School attempted to reframe and apply Marxist thought to contemporary industrialised society by critiquing its historically-grounded analytic categories (such as “false consciousness”), as well as to devise new ways of conceptualising the social condition of oppression (Brookfield, 2005). In essence, “Critical theory tradition draws on Marxist scholarship to illuminate the ways in which people accept as normal a world characterised by massive inequities and the systemic exploitation of the many by the few” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 2). Critical theory in this sociological/philosophical sense differs from its use in literary theory where it is ultimately a form of hermeneutics (interpretation: what did the text say originally).

Critical theory differentiates between ontological categories (subjectivity, objectivity, normative-evaluative) to identify the basis for particular “truth claims” (Carspecken, 1996, p.
10). It regards “knowledge” as historically situated and socially constructed: it also sees the social world in terms of a continuous struggle between domination and subjugation.

Criticalists recognise the oppressive nature of society, but the precise nature of that oppression is the object of empirical inquiry and not a given belief (Carspecken, 1996, p. 8). Oppression takes many forms and has many sources: it is “structural, institutional, interpersonal and intrapsychic; outrageous and civilized…” (Fine, 2006, p. 85). Because oppression is so complex, not straightforward or uni-dimensional, CT asserts the need for an interactive linkage between researcher and participant/s to unearth, name, and otherwise act upon that knowledge.

Critical theory has evolved to recognise numerous points of difference that give rise to inequality and not only the classic triumvirate of race/class/gender. Thus it attends to “…the ways that the economy; … ideologies; discourses; education, religion and other social institutions and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system” (Kinchloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 306). It also ascribes a greater role to individual human agency than did classic Marxism, regarding domination not as solely determined by social and economic structure(s), but rather as a negotiated (and negotiable) state of being.

It is possible to identify several major characteristics of a critical methodology (Brookfield, 2005; Fine & Weis, 2005; Kinchloe & McLaren, 2005; Ledwith, 2007). A critical methodology has both political and moral dimensions; it tends to focus on marginalised populations; and the concept of hegemony (as non-coercive control) is central to a critical perspective. Also, it holds the purpose of inquiry and understanding to be action, change, and transformation. Critical theory differs from other traditions of inquiry in its tendency to be critical of itself and not just critical of the particular social reality under scrutiny.
Challenges to critical theory can be divided into two types: one is aimed at the theoretical level and the other, more common, is directed at actual practice. The most common theory-level critique highlights the weak link between theory and action. CT seems to suggest that possession of adequate and sufficient knowledge will automatically produce enlightenment and subsequently, emancipation (Elliott, 2005; Nielsen, 1992). Yet CT is short on theoretical explanation of the links between knowledge and action, enlightenment and emancipation: “critical self-reflection doesn’t necessarily translate into empowering people to take action for the sake of an ideal….further conditions [motivations and capabilities] are required…to exercise agency” (Elliott, 2005, p. 362). Action, change, and transformation are desired outcomes, but the question of how such outcomes are achieved is contentious (that is: by what mechanisms, dependent on what necessary and sufficient conditions, and in which direction).

A related challenge arises from CT’s emphasis on rationality. CT seeks to facilitate liberation by making participants aware of hidden coercion by allowing them to see where their true interests lie (Nielsen, 1992). A theory of rationality suggests that people make choices based on one particular type of logic: that is, if people know what is “best” they will act on this “best”. However, rationality is a particular and individualistic type of logic. Highly valued though it is in Western contexts, rationality is not necessarily valued as a basis for decision-making in other cultural contexts. Emphasis on individual rationality may also place an inordinate weight on personal agency, an unreasonable burden for societies with collectivist social orientation, such as Cambodia.

Critical theory/ies are susceptible to accusations of determinism because proponents assume inequalities prior to inquiry. While CT does begin from the premise of structural oppression, this premise is not “taken on faith” but, rather, rendered explicit through collection
and presentation of evidence (Carspecken, 1996; Thomas, 1993). CT is sometimes perceived to be either ahistorical or obsolete in applying incongruent categories of analysis (Thomas, 1993). While this is not as much a theoretical shortcoming, as it is a gap between theory and practice, the result is the same – a neutered analysis. Related to this is concern that qualitative research -- critical theory-oriented approaches included -- may tend toward being “too local” or “site specific” in its focus on individuals and particularities (Anderson, 1989, p. 259). This perspective could detract from comprehensive environmental analysis and identification of the root causes of oppression, which in turn could prevent necessary action and liberation. And finally, critical theorists tend to focus on disenfranchised populations, the “oppressed” end of the equation rather than to also look at oppressors, though increasingly there are suggestions that researching “up” and requiring change on the part of the powerful might be a very important exercise (Chambers, 2004; Fine, 2006). Focusing exclusively on marginalised groups may, conversely, result in “victim-blaming”, solidify simplistic stereotypes, or entrench fatalist tendencies and excuse prevailing injustices.

**Feminist research perspectives**

Feminism in the context of social science research is perhaps best characterised by pluralism, applied in a normative and descriptive sense (DeVault, 1996; Oleson, 2005). Tong’s (1998) classic work, *Feminist Thought* tentatively identifies eight particular categories or types of feminism: liberal, radical, Marxist and socialist, psychoanalytic and gender, existentialist, postmodern, multicultural and global, and ecofeminism, concluding (in true feminist fashion) that these categories are “partial, provisional, and suggestive in nature” (p. 9). Essential attributes of things theoretically “feminist” are minimal – recognition of gender, and attendant (unjust) asymmetry, as a fundamental category of (constructed) social order and the necessity
of acting upon that (Fonow & Cook, 2005; Hesse-Biber & Leckenby, 2004; Lather, 1986; Walker, 2004). Feminist research is not necessarily always conducted with women, but women are always in view as feminism is inherently conscious of women’s chronic condition of social subordination.

Feminist scholars run the entire epistemological gamut from positivist to post-structuralist, placing themselves across the range of qualitative research paradigms (Hesse-Biber, Leavey, & Yaiser, 2004; Lather, 2006), and likewise are not restricted to particular research methods. This is because while “(t)here is an overarching concept of feminist methodology in its epistemological assumptions…on the way from ideas to practice this concept is differentially articulated in different disciplines” (Fonow & Cook, 2005, p. 3). In fact, if feminists agree on anything, it is that while there is no such thing as a global, homogenous, unified, universal “feminism” (Oleson, 2005), there are distinctive feminist approaches to the investigation of social organisation (DeVault, 1996; Hesse-Biber, Leavey, & Yaiser, 2004).

This overarching feminist epistemology “investigates the influence of socially constituted conceptions and norms of gender and gender-specific interest and experiences on the production of knowledge” (Anderson, 2002, p. 316, emphasis mine). Feminism applied to social science generally is not limited to producing “specifically feminist ontologies, methodologies, standpoints, paradigms, or doctrines,” but it actually “[alters] the field of theoretical possibilities” (Anderson, 2002, p. 347). That is, research informed by feminist commitments re-visions the research landscape as it “makes new explanatory models available, reframes old questions, exposes facts that undermine the plausibility of previously dominant
theories, improves data-gathering techniques, and shifts the relations of cognitive authority among fields and theories” (p. 347).

From an original concern about the absence of women as objects in empirical studies, feminism’s critique of the positivist epistemological position evolved to question the very definition of science, (masculine) referents, standards of conduct, and science’s privileging of particular definitions of knowledge, knowing, knower (Oleson, 2005). Diverse contributors from the global South as well as North then problematised women as a universal category; this served to catalyse formulation and application of such concepts as reflexivity, positionality, voice, and socially-situated knowledge. More recent themes in feminist theorising include “embodiment”, “difference”, and experimentation with representation (Fonow & Cook, 2005; Oleson, 2005).

Feminism poses provocative questions about the “why” and “who” (of research subjects and objects) and implications of scientific inquiry, not simply the “how”, based on a core tenet that “belief in the value neutrality of social scientific and other intellectual practices serves to mask the relations of ruling embedded in the production of knowledge in the academy” (Naples, 2003, p. 52). Feminism also challenges conventional binaries such as subject/object, theory/praxis, and researcher/researched (Fonow & Cook, 2005; Harding, 1991; Naples, 2003; Ramazanoglu, 2002). Together, these feminist sensibilities have revolutionized the way that social science inquiry is done.

More than other forms of inquiry, “feminist” when applied to the research project is qualified with an array of terms (including “approach,” “perspective,” “principles,” “attitude,” “framework,” “commitment,” “process,” and “aim”) to indicate that fundamentally it refers to a way or ways of conceptualising academic inquiry, as well as enacting that inquiry. So, what
defines, distinguishes, delineates feminist research? “Feminism supplies the perspective and
the disciplines supply the methods – the feminist researcher exists at their intersection”
(Reinharz, 1992, p. 243). A feminist perspective includes concern/attention to equality,
collaboration, democracy, reflexivity, and empowerment in the very process of conducting
research (Huisman, 2008). “Power as dilemma”, recognition of the relations and sources of
power, concern with how it is organised and conducted, and deconstruction of power relations,
goes a long way to summarise a feminist perspective (Ramazanoglu, 2002; Wolf, 1996).

The following features, indicative rather than comprehensive, may be considered as
characteristic of feminist research. Feminism “has a theoretical commitment to explicate the
intersections of gender, race-ethnicity, class, and other social structural aspects of social life
without privileging one dimension or adopting an additive formulation” (Naples, 2003, p. 52).
This requires careful reflection on and examination of the nature of a research process; keen
awareness of ethical implications and attempts to minimise exploitation are notable; a focus on
collaboration, participation, equality, reciprocity as integral; as well as aims of empowerment
and emancipation of participants based on knowledge jointly created, and transformation of
formerly exploitive systems (Fonow & Cook, 2005; Gatenby & Humphries, 2000; Hesse-Biber

Many of the challenges to feminist research are also commonly levied at qualitative
research more generally. Not infrequently, feminist research projects are branded as
“unscientific”, insufficiently theoretical, excessively descriptive and inadequately analytical,
(Gatenby & Humphries, 2000; Ramazanoglu, 2002; Walker, 2004). Feminist research is also
accused of relying on a small number of vaguely defined theoretical concepts - patriarchy,
oppression, and agency in particular (Ramazanoglu, 2002; Walker, 2004). To this, perhaps the
most obvious rejoinder is Walker’s, that “reliance on poorly defined constructs is not solely the province of feminists” (Walker, 2004, p. 993). Examples of this include the social sciences’ undisciplined incorporation of “social capital” and “reflexivity.” In short, the “validity and authority of feminist is always contested” (p. 993), pressured by the wider academic community to justify its knowledge claims, control subjectivity and reduce personal bias, be less political, and comply with more conventional research norms (Hall & Stevens, 1991). Paradoxically, these are among the very characteristics that define feminist methodologies.

Further, feminist research is sometimes criticised for presenting women as an undifferentiated category and particularly ignoring race-based distinctions (Bulbeck, 1998; McCann & Kim, 2002; Mohanty, 1988; Oleson, 2005). And a critique levied by practitioners is that feminist research may lead a researcher to commit the moral crimes (exploitation, betrayal, researcher abandonment of research participants) the methodology ardently seek to avoid (Wolf, 1996). This dilemma is succinctly captured in the title of Huisman’s (2008) exploration of the ethics of reciprocity in one participatory feminist research initiative: “Does this mean you’re not going to come visit me anymore?” As Huisman concludes it is impossible to achieve moral purity in feminist qualitative research, but this itself is sufficient reason to keep troubling the process. In regard to ethical dilemmas particular to a feminist perspective, Wolf (1996, p. 25) asserts that solutions have not been found because there are only questions.

The process employed in this research was intentionally convergent with several key feminist principles. First, the research was collaborative, though perhaps to a much greater degree this occurred with research assistants then with village respondents because extended dialogue with those assistants (and other key informants during the analysis stage) formed the
cradle in which my understanding was nurtured. One reason for this was my reluctance to share findings too quickly because of the local proclivity for “getting it right” and for doing what foreign educators say must be done – my aim was to listen not tell; to watch, not correct. A second reason for relying on key informants was the difficulty I experienced in generating reflective analysis on practice amongst village-level respondents during the relatively short time for fieldwork. In addition to being intentionally collaborative, I also shared significant amount of information about myself (self-disclosure) in the process of everyday village living.

Secondly, one of the most poignant lessons from decades of discussion about “women in development” is that unless women are a specific focus in development projects or research, they are likely to be ignored or otherwise overlooked in favour of more visible, and vocal, male counterparts. I attempted to circumvent this by intentionally creating spaces for meaningful participation by women and girls. One practical way this was done was by conducting FGD with children and adults, in same-sex groups as a way of facilitating participation. This is because in Cambodia, it’s been my experience that if both males and females are present in a group setting, females tend to defer to males regardless of either’s formal positioning. Further, I gave specific attention to the presence/absence of gender, inclusion/exclusion of female perspective/s as an organising theme in the local construction of experience. In addition, I strove to engage respondents based on persons rather than on positions. For instance, because most often males are in positions of formal authority I intentionally sought [informal] female leaders in order to incorporate their ideas and perspectives.

Third, employing a feminist approach also required methodologies that are empowering to participants; and engaging meaningfully with decision-makers and policy-debates with a view to effecting change. To this end, I used participatory research methods at the village
level; and I researched “up” within the MoEYS; “out” to hear voices from the international NGO community; as well as distributed an initial research report to people in strategic positions within multilateral agencies and NGOs.

**Postcolonial theorising**

Though fundamentally about historic colonial relations, nevertheless an expanded version of postcolonial thought intentionally addresses power, identity, ideology, and agency. Thus, it can offer a useful frame for conceptualising formal education as it occurs in Cambodia today and in LICs more generally. With issues of power and voice at its centre, postcolonial theorising facilitates understanding of connection/s between local actor/s and larger political, economic, and social processes which circumscribe possible interaction and outcome.

Centring local perspectives enables consideration of (sub)alternatives to dominant discourse(s), reveal the discursive nature of current educational “reality”, and thereby facilitate material and practical changes in the structure and implementation of formal education.

Stretched as it has been across numerous academic disciplines and constrained to accommodate globalisation, postcolonialism is experiencing “re-narrativisation” (Tikly & Crossly, 2004), moving away from its narrow origins in literary criticism (too highly abstract) and a restricted focus on the continued impact of Euro-American colonisation (as insufficiently attentive to the complexity of contemporary networks and flows of power – see Rizvi, Lingard & Lavia, 2006). A contemporary understanding of postcolonial theorising increasingly recognises that “sub-alternity” is a dynamic identity even as it attends to the voice/s of the subaltern (Spivak, 1988), celebrates diversity, addresses issues of inequitable social stratification, and challenges uncritical use of categories including race, culture, language, class, gender. Finally, postcolonialism “acknowledges that the transculturation of the
colonising experience was irreversible for all involved. It focuses on the necessity for paradigms that capture the relationships, interconnectedness and discontinuities that colonisation set in play” (Hickling-Hudson, 1998, p. 328). In relation to globalisation, then, it understands that “…globalisation represents not so much the end of ethnic and colonialist struggles…as a force through which these struggles are continually re-articulated and re-placed and through which the transitivity of relations like coloniser/colonised, centre/local is continually proved” (During, 1998, p. 46). There are clear parallels between this expanded notion of postcolonialism and feminist analysis. They share parallel epistemological claims/priorities, including minimisation of power differentials, democratic production of knowledge, and awareness of cultural hybridity (Power, Mohan & Mercer, 2006).

In several distinct ways, postcolonial thinking illuminates the international development debate. Four points can usefully be read against formal education by virtue of education’s role as one element of the larger international development agenda. First, a postcolonial critique emphasises the necessity of troubling the “unconsciously ethnocentric” (dominant) discourses of imperial Europe, including development, because they are “profoundly insensitive to the meanings, values, and practices of other cultures” (McEwan, 2001, p. 94). Second, a postcolonial critique “deconstructs colonial prose” understood as the “mental set-up, the symbolic forms and representations underpinning the imperial project” (Mbemba, 2008).

….in opposition to the Marxist doxa of the period…the colonial project was not reducible to a simple military-economic system, but was underpinned by a discursive infrastructure, a symbolic economy, a whole apparatus of knowledge the violence of which was as much epistemic as it was physical (Mbemba, 2008)
Third, a postcolonial perspective challenges the “practices of naming” (McEwan, 2001, p. 95); that is, the speaking and writing which materialise as dominant discourse, as well as the locus of power (who does the naming). And fourth, postcolonialism “attempts to recover the lost historical and contemporary voices of the marginalised, the oppressed and the dominated….to overcome inequalities by opening up space for the agency of non-western people” (McEwan, 2001, p. 95). Combined with a critical feminist perspective, a postcolonial approach can provide a “holistic understanding of development [that] put[s] human survival and non-western philosophies at the centre, producing alternative understandings based on relevant and empowering ideas generated by indigenous culture” (McEwan, 2001, p. 107).

There are many ways to understand the relationship between globalisation, development, and education as enacted in the global South. Historically education was seen to emanate from, and be dictated by, particular educational philosophy/ies. For instance, an essentialist classroom focused on student mastery of centrally determined basic academic skills and knowledge. A teacher with a progressive orientation planned lessons to stimulate student curiosity and was not so concerned with consecutive treatment of discrete subjects but might combine several in one learning activity. However, since the 1950s, popular alternative theoretical frames have included political economy, world systems theory, and theories of underdevelopment and neo-colonialism (dependency theory) as explanations for change and outcomes (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002; Gopinathan & Altbach, 2005). Such conceptual shifts indicate a growing understanding of the (potentially complex) links between economic, political, and social forces and education. What is more, the intensity and scope of globalisation, its extensive influence on multiple spheres of individual and collective life (education central among them), requires different models of analysis of the dialectical
relationship of local and global (Hickling-Hudson, 1998). Thus proponents assert that previous analytic frames were inadequately cognisant of multiple layers of influence, and insufficiently critical of the core dynamics of power (relationships amongst actors), issues of identity (intersectionality, hybridity), ideology, and agency (voice) of local (subaltern) actors.

Given that “education is a site where legacies of colonisation and the contemporary processes of globalization intersect” (Rizvi, Lingard & Lavia, 2006, p. 257), it is surprising that the application of postcolonial theorising to education is still relatively uncommon in international and comparative education. A postcolonial perspective focuses on the need attend to voices of traditionally marginalised populations. By centralising the concept/issue of power, and centring local voices (Simon, 2006; Tikly & Crossley, 2004), a postcolonial approach to analysing globalised education represents the possibility of arriving at a more nuanced understanding of the interface between global and local factors as they influence the enactment, and results, of basic education. From this viewpoint, subaltern voices, histories and identities are prioritised (rather than ignored, or worse, discounted or obliterated) (Simon, 2006). This represents a potentially important contribution to Cambodia, where the subaltern hasn’t even spoken out yet, much less been heard.

Postcolonial sensitivities influenced the framing of my original research questions and the location in which I sought to find knowledge and information, in the process of my inquiry as well as in the interpretation of results. While demonstrating that Cambodian formal education is indeed strongly influenced by neoliberal models promoted by multilateral and UN agencies that have implicitly tasked themselves with global governance, my research refused to regard the “Cambodian formal education” as a singular unit thereby allowing me to reveal ways in which local power structures are actively marginalising education practitioners who
reside at the village level. A postcolonial perspective illuminates the presence of concentric power structures; that is, it facilitates identification of the colonising impulse that occurs at different turns, such as demands by central MOEYS authorities for unquestioning compliance by provincial level authorities. This same impulse is evident when, within the Cambodia frame we narrow the focus even further to gaze upon the texts produced by those who run the national education system and discover, for instance, the portrayal of indigenous ethnic minorities that live within the geographic boundaries of Cambodia, as exotic, primitive, wholly other. In these same texts, Khmer females are reified as reproductive workers and protectors of tradition. And then when we narrow in on a rural, village setting, this research also demonstrates again the colonising impulse as the centre rules with fear and makes it virtually impossible for insiders to interrogate the system.

Secondly, at central level there is hardly any room for debate on the nature of the educational enterprise, no fostering of indigenous perspective on educational philosophy, for instance. Global aims and goals are swallowed whole by central level authorities; the result is an awkward fit, insufficient attention to local ways and means which serves to hamper effective teaching. At village level teachers’ response is visceral and framed by action, rather than by analytical academic discussion or engagement. Ensuing discomfort and cognitive dissonance is expressed as disempowerment and frustration with current demands which they see running counter to “productive pedagogy.”

**Commonalities amongst the traditions**

Feminist research, critical theory, and postcolonial theorising have several commonalities in strengths and limitations. Most importantly, they converge on an epistemological level (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In fact, more than
simply supporting particular methods, these traditions are fundamentally concerned with the epistemological questions of knowledge creation and legitimisation, and with expanding the conventional perspective on who gets to name and validate particular experience/s as knowledge. And in response, their centre holds – these traditions are critical at the core; they highly value democratic, respectful, reciprocal, and participatory processes.

There are numerous practical commonalities shared by the three methodological traditions. First, all interrogate and seek to collapse the commonly-held research binaries of subject/object, theory/praxis, and researcher/researched. Just how this is enacted varies upon the mode – for instance, postcolonial inquiry demands that “subjects” are genuine “participants” and integral actors in each step of the process; whilst from a feminist angle, this concern more readily takes the form of debate about voice and whose knowledge counts. In practical terms, this means each of the traditions has a “democratic tendency,” a preference for processes and methods that are collaborative and reciprocal. This is strongest in feminism while for critical theory the preference is expressed more in terms of subject selection, with emphasis on marginalised populations; and a postcolonial emphasis shines a light on marginalised subjects to facilitate them speaking in their own voice. Practicing these theories requires a high degree of flexibility because all are heavily context and participant-dependent.

Second, all are explicitly values-based and normative, or “openly ideological” (Lather, 1986), which is to say that all three traditions are “emancipatory” in that their overt aim at contributing directly (through action of research participants) to a “better” future, one characterised by a greater degree of equity and social justice, especially for research participants. Third, all are critical in the sense that their analyses moves beyond the immediate narratives of research subjects to broader processes and social relations. Additionally, all of
these approaches are intentionally focused on social relations and inequalities. Reality is regarded as more than/other than simply negotiated accounts – in other words, the perceptions and ideas of those participating in the research is not likely to provide a full account of the dominant influences on their lives. And fourth, by nature, all value and require a high degree of “reflexivity” – rendering transparent the “person/s” of the researcher and the participants (positionality, role, personality, agency, influence upon all stages of the inquiry process); activating analysis of the local, national, and global structure/s of society, politics, and economics, as well as historical influences.

Just as these three research traditions share several epistemological and methodological commonalities, likewise, they attract the same basic points of critique and concern. There are four major challenges. First, inherent power differentials between researcher and participants make it difficult to achieve the ideals of reciprocity and democratic engagement. Second, it is difficult to honour the action orientation of all these research methodologies because to some extent, this is beyond the control of the researcher. The researcher’s primary task is to attempt to create conditions conducive to participants taking action (of their own design), but it is difficult to know precisely what those conditions might be in a given setting, and change may occur long after a researcher has departed. Third, it is difficult to “raise consciousness” and bring a critical perspective to bear on a situation without imposing or directing the uptake of that information. And fourth, methodological rigor is difficult to achieve because of the flexibility required by these methodologies.

A carefully structured inquiry both actively acknowledges these potential limits in the process of research, as well as in interpreting results. In summary, all research methodologies have limits. Selecting a particular set of theoretical and methodological traditions allows
mitigation of some of the limitations inherent in various traditions by drawing on contributions of (an)other perspective(s).

**Methodology as hybridity**

These three theoretical and methodological traditions were converged through employment of critical (educational) ethnography (CE) in the form of a prolonged stay in one particular village and focus on one particular school and cluster. Village level information was supplemented by “researching up” with key power-brokers in the Ministry of Education and NGO leaders and “researching out” to include the perspectives of Cambodian and expatriate educators. Critical analysis of government policy and report documents, and documents produced by multilateral and UN agencies, was another major component of this research endeavour. This hybrid research methodology could also be regarded as a “vertical case study” (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2006) in that while it was grounded in a particular site, understanding of the micro-level was viewed as “part and parcel of larger structures, forces, and policies” (p. 96). A vertical case study “attends to the ways in which historical trends, social structures, and national and international forces shape local processes at this site” with the goal of developing “a thorough understanding of the particular at each level and to analyze how these understandings produce similar and different interpretations of the policy problem, or phenomenon under study” (p. 96).

Ethnography can be regarded as a particular combination of features in the service of research. These features include prolonged time within participants’ setting(s), researcher involvement as both observer and participant, analysis of how context informs action and meaning derived from it, accounts of the (evolving) relationship between researcher/ed, multiple data sources, generation of descriptive data, and researcher field notes and
preoccupation with issue of “representation” in an ethnographic text (Schwandt, 2007, p. 96; Skeggs, 2001, p. 426). There are many different types of ethnography, including naturalist, modernist, realist, feminist, postmodern, comparative, and social constructionist ethnography (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland & Lofland, 2001; Bartlett, 2007; Skeggs, 2001; Woolcott, 2008). What differentiates them, primarily, is the politics of the researcher (Skeggs, 2001, p. 431).

While not particularly creative, then, the label of “critical ethnography” (CE) doubles as a straightforward description of this method. CE is, essentially, an application of CT to ethnography that thereby expands the ethnographic desire to know about, to a desire to know collaboratively for the purpose of positive transformation. The influence of critical theory is both methodological (CE is value-laden, empowering to participants, challenges the status quo, addresses issues of power and control of resources), as well as substantive (themes of study include power, inequality, dominance, repression) (Cresswell, 2007). CE originated in the field of educational research in the late 1960s with application of more traditional ethnographic methods to the study of “education” and “school” as obvious sites of cultural reproduction (Carspecken, 1995; Jordon & Yoemans, 1995). In philosophical terms, Anderson (1989) traces CE’s conception to a merger of independent trends in epistemology and social theory. “The interpretivist focus [in anthropology and sociology] on human agency and local knowledge appealed greatly to neo-Marxists and feminists who were caught in a web of over-determinism” (Anderson, 1989, p. 251). Critical ethnography carefully attends both to the role of (individual) actors, as well as overarching structural mechanisms that promote social harmony and ideological conformity thereby influencing conceptualisation and enactment of “choices” for compliance or resistance (Anderson, 1989; Thomas, 1993, p. 3).
Thomas (1993) notes that not all aspects of critical ethnography will be critical. Like conventional ethnography, CE relies on qualitative interpretation of data, follows core rules of ethnographic methods and analysis, adheres to a symbolic interactionist paradigm, and has a distinct preference for inductive theorising (Thomas, 1993). The major difference between conventional and critical ethnography is that CE explicitly renders the narrator’s political interests (Gordon, Holland, & Lahelma, 2001, p. 194): critical narrators see, organise, interpret, and narrate social events in terms of critical theory (Brodkey, 1987). The two streams also differ in another important way. Where conventional ethnography aims for description, analysis, and interpretation of meaning, critical ethnography makes value-laden judgments of meaning to challenge for change. Where traditional ethnographers speak for their subjects, criticalists speak on behalf of their subjects as a way of giving their message more authority (Brodkey, 1987; Thomas, 1993).

Challenges to a critical ethnographic approach fall into three categories: it is insufficiently critical, inadequately ethnographic, or criticism relates to with shortcomings of critical methodologies more generally. Critique from the first category cites an inherent colonial impulse that necessarily “others” (in the verb sense) marginalised (people less powerful) “subjects” in disrespectful ways (Anderson, 1989; Hytten, 2004; Madison, 2005). Ethnography is criticised because it assumes homogeneity and harmony amongst “subjects”, neglecting to recognise difference and conflict. It is also asserted that by nature CE is neither sufficiently reflexive nor appropriately historical (Anderson, 1989; Jordan & Yoemans, 1985), spending too much time in the mess of daily, detailed life while paying insufficient attention to larger contexts (Fine, 2006: Ledwith, 2007). It can also tend to lapse into simplistic application of categories without troubling either the categories or application of them. The
classic critique in the third category reckons that because criticalists are unabashedly values-based, \textit{a priori} ideas will eclipse true findings and analysis, viz. Anderson (1989).

Like CT, critical ethnography is taken to task for inadequately linking theory to action (Anderson, 1989; Elliot, 2005; Ledwith, 2007; Nielsen, 1992). While this critique may have merit, revolution should not be valorised as the only valid measure of critical research’s success. There are numerous types of changes (or action) that might result from application of critical ethnography, including: individual cognition, interaction, networking, helping students think, community organising/legislative reform (Thomas, 1993, p. 32). In summary, most critique of the CE methodology is levelled primarily at practice rather than at the theoretical level, suggesting that conscientious attention to the “critical” aspect of CE may mitigate potentially myopic inclinations.

**Challenges of Qualitative Research**

There is no such thing as pure academic research, regardless of epistemology, ideology, or methodology – in part due to the institutional nature of the enterprise. Even when we know better, we may be constrained by short timelines, personal inadequacies, funding stipulations, and academic requirements to compromise ideal research norms; and sometimes good intentions are short-circuited by implicit values. Therefore, the least, and the best, researchers can do is to name and actively interrogate the tensions inherent in the social inquiry project as it is taken up through a qualitative emancipatory paradigm (Gatenby & Humphries, 2000; Katz, 1996; Oleson, 2005; Stacey, 1988; Wolfe, 1996).

There are several challenges common to all forms of qualitative inquiry. These are, chiefly: reflexivity, representation, and legitimisation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Fine, 2006; Lather, 2006). The prominence of these and other “generic concerns” stems in large measure
from feminist reflections on qualitative research. However, precisely how they are addressed depends on methodological inclinations rather than feminism *per se*. The point in troubling these issues is not to solve them, but rather, to delineate time- and context-bound views of them, thereby rendering the process and results of qualitative inquiry more transparent and credible and true. Highlighting potential dilemmas at the outset allows development of strategies for mitigating both potential adverse effects of the research on participants, and maximising the trustworthiness of the data and credibility of the research enterprise.

**Reflexivity**

By revealing the “fiction of neutrality” (Ewick, 2001, p. 22), the sheer impossibility of conducting completely values-free inquiry, feminists underscore the fallacy of conventional science’s view of “objectivity” (Harding, 2002). As an alternative, Harding juxtaposes mainstream science’s “weak objectivity” (which obscures multiple layers of subjectivity and interpretation -- what conventional science actually practices) with a preferred variant, “strong objectivity” (which make public a full account of the interpretive processes of knowledge production). Harding argues that the researcher who seeks to reveal, rather than to obscure, the bases of her/his knowledge has a more genuine claim to that knowledge (Ewick, 2001).

Reflexivity enables researchers to function from a position of “strong objectivity”. An exceedingly popular, if ill-defined, concept in the social sciences, reflexivity has by some accounts, achieved “hegemonic” status (Maton, 2003, p. 54). Reflexivity can be described as a method for locating or situating the researcher’s self in the research picture vis-à-vis the object/s of study so that the researcher’s knowledge claims can be assessed “in terms of situated aspects of their social selves and…their (often hidden) doxic values and assumptions” (p. 54). “Most basically, reflexivity describes the capacity of any system of signification,
including a human being…to turn back upon or to mirror itself” (Robertson, 2002, p. 785). Further, this practice “acknowledges that all knowledge bears the impress of the social relations entailed in its production” and has become a means for responding to “power inequalities [in the research process] that cannot necessarily be overcome, undone, or even predicted, but which can be thought about and acted upon” (Bondi, 2009, p. 328).

Reflexivity’s popularity can be traced to convergence of two streams. One stream is a long-standing desire by cultural anthropologists to more publicly account for the omniscient but invisible author-narrator behind ethnographic tales. The second stream is feminist reflection about the research process that has served to intensify awareness of the power relations entailed by knowledge production and inherent within the relationship between researcher and researched (Bondi, 2009; Moser, 2008; Opie, 1992; Robertson, 2002).

Reflexivity is a complex venture. Such examination of the research enterprise must be undertaken continuously, on multiple levels, in different directions, and by various actors (Daley, 2010). Authentic reflexivity would include analysing the following elements because each influences the results of inquiry: a) researcher’s positionality and ideological bias; b) researcher’s agentic role in knowledge creation (choice of methods, location, etc.); c) researcher’s constructs and categories; d) subjects’ common sense constructs and categories; e) subjects’ reflection/s on the meaning of experiences under investigation; f) how the researcher writes her/himself into the text; and g) audience reflection on meanings produced (Anderson, 1989; Fonow & Cook, 2005). It should also include analysis of the researcher’s discipline itself as a site of knowledge production (Maton, 2003), as well as structural and historical forces informing the social constructs under investigation (Anderson, 1989). Segall (2001) pushes this still farther, challenging (ethnographers in particular) to problematise the
“invocation of voice” – that is, to interrogate the positionality of the academics/works quoted in publications rather than to take the words of those academics/works at face value. For those who conduct research in the global South, reflexivity is even more complicated, requiring careful attentiveness to “histories of colonialism, development, globalisation, and local realities [in order] to avoid exploitative research or perpetuation of relations of domination and control” (Sultana, 2007, p. 375).

Positionality, also called “identity politics” or “difference” (McCorkel & Myer, 2003) is one distinct aspect of reflexivity. Frequently reference to a researcher’s identity is neglected altogether. Sometimes publications include mention of specific attributes or variables, but fail to make explicit links to the research effort (Maton, 2003). Where “positionality” is explicitly attempted, it commonly occurs at the start of a piece/publication and takes the form of the author’s self-placement in various meta-categories such as race/ethnicity, nationality, gender, socio-economic status, religious affiliation, family history, sexuality, education level (etc.) and may be further complicated by attempts at placing that self at the intersection of particular adjectives (Robertson, 2002). While such efforts to locate the researcher vis-à-vis the researched are valuable, it is a rather limited way to conceptualise and understand this dynamic relationship. For instance, Moser (“a female, ‘white’, Canadian, graduate student, middle class, and so on”) working cross-culturally in Indonesia quickly realised that personality (“my social skills, my emotional responses to and interest in local events, how I conducted myself and the manner in which I navigated the personalities of others”) affected access to people, stories, and events and ultimately had a (more) significant impact on the material gathered (Moser, 2008 p. 383). Robertson (2002) also speaks from experience of conducting research internationally and across cultures (UK and Japan):
Writing ‘as (name the category)’ may serve to position or locate [a researcher] within the academy’s paint-by-number landscape but going to do fieldwork ‘as a (name the category)’ is an *a priori* position that can effectively render [the researcher] impervious to intellectual aesthetic, and emotional transformation and challenges from new encounters, acquaintances, and experiences (p. 790).

For all its benefits, there are, of course, risks to engaging in reflexivity, perhaps the most obvious of which is deterioration toward little more than confession or catharsis (Bondi, 2009, p. 329), or nothing more than simplistic autobiographical reflection that lacks connection to the research (Davies, 1998/2008). Maton cautions against such “hermeneutic narcissism”, or “authorship denial”, both of which “begin by recognising objectification but end by denying it, either through self-absorption or self-denial” (2003, p. 55). The antidote is, of course, to practice Harding’s strong reflexivity which is more holistic than narcissistic.

**Strong reflexivity involves four considerations.** First, it recognises the on-going nature of reflexivity, that reflexivity is a singular declaration but a persistent negotiation of identity and relationship in a dynamic environment. Second, it does not assume that personality traits are self-evident “essentialized qualities that are magically synonymous with self-consciousness, or, for that matter, with intellectual engagement and theoretical rigor” (Robertson, 2002, p. 790). Third, strong reflexivity conscientiously connects the results of reflexive thinking back (and forth) to the research issue/s and process. And fourth, it takes a comprehensive view of the process, incorporating attention to vertical and horizontal influences and relationships.

**(Re)presentation**

A second major challenge confronting qualitative inquiry is that of (re)presentation, and this may be especially true for cross-cultural research. Representation has two distinct parts. First, it requires prior understanding – and in this regard, it is no longer assumed that lived
experience can be directly captured by investigators because that very experience “is created in the social text written by the researcher” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 19). Lived experience, and subsequently meaning, cannot simply be extracted as though they exist independent of the researcher/ed. Rather, they must be understood, recognised, and accounted for in that they are achieved through transactional, co-constructive processes (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004, p. 140), and then only approximately. Because there is no transparent medium through which a social world can be represented (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006), careful and respectful listening, strong reflexivity, and careful, rigorous analysis are absolutely vital – it is neither adequate nor accurate to take words at face value. The research environment and dynamics of interaction must be analysed, incorporated, and made public to enable understanding of recorded event/s and meaning/s (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006; Holstein & Gubrium, 2004).

Secondly, it is important that qualitative researchers find ways to magnify the voices of research participants, without assuming that it is within their power to grant voice (in which case they are not truly representing, viz. Spivak in Hesse-Biber & Leckenby, 2004, p. 213). This point derives directly from the underlying philosophy of a critical/emancipatory worldview which demands attempts at equalising the relationship between researcher and participants, and assumes equal ability and right to generate and name “knowledge” (see above). Further it is insufficient to think that the researcher’s role is simply to “give voice” – experiences of marginalised people must also be recognised and represented as credible knowledge (Krumen-Nevo, 2009). Uneasiness about “voice” and about how “best” to understand and represent the voices of research participants is a hallmark of feminist research (Oleson, 2005). A feminist perspective does not provide answers, but rather the more valuable service of posing questions.
Credibility: Validity re-visited

Validity, reliability, and generalisability are the holy grail of positivist research (Brookfield, 2005). Within the positivist paradigm, these three goals are defined in mathematical and statistical terms. As such, they are not necessarily desirable, nor achievable, from a qualitative perspective and represent another example of “the inadequacies of positivist assumptions in the face of the complexities of human experience” (Lather, 1986, p. 63). Altogether different standards and criteria from those used to evaluate quantitative research must be applied to judge the merits of qualitative research because its aims and underlying presuppositions differ from quantitative norms. A qualitative epistemology suggests that all “reality” is context-dependent; therefore, it is impossible to replicate precisely or to extrapolate with certainty to a larger population.

Still, qualitative research has a similar concern with credibility and rigor (Labuschagne, 2003; Marshall, 1985). To address these concerns in the qualitative paradigm it is necessary to start by reframing the question. Guba & Lincoln (2005, p. 205) suggest asking three questions. First, “Would I feel sufficiently secure about these findings to construct a social policy or legislation based on them?” Second, “Can I or the community act on these findings?” And third, “Can I demonstrate methodological and/or interpretive rigor?” In response to these concerns, “trustworthiness” as a standard of accountability in qualitative research has been taken up perhaps more than any other (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). “Legitimisation” is another popular way to frame this concept in qualitative terms (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Alternate terms, more in keeping with qualitative research’s foundational perspectives on the nature of knowledge and knowledge production, include: apparency, verisimilitude, transferability, adequacy, plausibility, and authenticity (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).
Lather (1986) suggests four guidelines to make qualitative research credible according to (its own) more relevant standard/s and criteria. “Triangulation” refers to inclusion of “multiple data sources, methods, and theoretical schemes…..” It is important that research seeks contrary as well as convergent patterns. “Construct validity” is achieved through systematised reflexivity that provides indication of how a priori theory/ies have been changed by the logic of the data. “Face validity”, also called “member checks” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981 cited in Lather, 1986 p. 67) is accomplished by recycling analysis back through at least a sub-sample of respondents with refinement as necessary). Fourth, “catalytic validity” is a term that refers to “the degree to which the research process re-orient, focuses, and energises participants…knowing reality in order to better transform it” (Lather, 1986, p. 67).

In summary, practice of strong reflexivity and conscientious application of Lather’s guidelines will go a long way to address the potential limitations inherent in the four research traditions which comprise my research framework. It is important to reflect on the research process itself, as well as “findings”.

**Particular Challenges of Cross-cultural Research**

In addition to negotiating the standard hazards of qualitative research, cross-cultural research has its own intrinsic challenges. First and foremost, power dynamics must be recognised and thereafter, constantly negotiated. To address this, with Katz (1996):

I [a Caucasian woman researching in Sudan] take as my starting point that social relations are ordered by the social construction of boundaries—political, economic, social, physical—over time and space; and contemporary social relations of production and reproduction, which are hierarchical and uneven, are oppressive and exploitative to most people in most places. (p. 171)

As a Caucasian expatriate and one with connections to a locally prestigious institution (Royal University of Phnom Penh - RUPP), I was likely accorded (more) deference by rural research
participants than would otherwise have been the case. Related to my perceived status were strong expectations for me to make tangible contributions (financial assistance) both to individuals as well as to community projects, both in the village of focus and in schools within the wider cluster. In this research context, Khmer values of hierarchy, deference, and harmony may have caused research participants to (consider) alter(ing) the telling of what they “really” believed, thought, saw, understood in favour of relaying what they thought I wanted to hear. It is also difficult for participants to directly contradict or oppose a foreigner, even when they strongly disagree.

Second, in conducting research across cultures, it is tempting to assume the universality of social constructions that (a privileged researcher) is familiar with, and to apply this foreign framework on local reality rather than seeing alternative (local) ways of understanding or interpreting social formation and behaviour (O’Leary, 2009). This potential danger is most certainly exacerbated by communication across languages and cultures. As Maclean (2007) points out, translation is fraught with both ethical and epistemic dilemmas: “The process of communicating research participants’ words in a different language and context may impose another conceptual scheme on their thoughts” (p. 784).

A third potential difficulty relates to communication and the possibility for misunderstanding that arises when a researcher working in a language other than her first. Birbili warns, “…the translation process…can present various types of problems, some of which may not be completely overcome” (1999: p. 1). She then outlines dimensions of potential translation-related problems which requires opting for free, modified, or literal translation (“gaining conceptual equivalence”; “comparability of grammatical form”; and making local words and ideas “accessible and understandable”) and techniques for addressing
them. Birbili’s most important point is the need to make translation decisions, whatever they are, explicit. Working with female Khmer research assistant/s that both had a high level of English language fluency (my mother tongue) positively contributed to addressing language and communication issues, but throughout the inquiry process I was keenly aware that always, the accuracy of translation, deriving meaning from across the room so to speak, is in question. Working with interpreters is not failsafe and brings with it another set of challenges. The literature suggests that in cross-cultural research, the interpreter’s role is generally under-acknowledged. Response including trying to limit, control, or at least analyse “interpreter effect” (Birbili, 2000; Jeutsch, 1998; Twyman, Morrison & Sporton, 1999). In my research, I accounted for the presence and persons of the two women who worked as research assistants in several ways. First, I included them as interviewees so that I could learn their perspective on education in Cambodia as well as better understand their individual cultural standpoint. Second, I facilitated opportunity for them to proactively engage in conversational self-reflexivity as it related specifically to the research project. And third, I required both research assistants to make their own notes during daily observation periods and then to debrief regularly on our (independent) observations and questions. This document contains then, both the theoretical and actual voices of my research assistants.

Making cultural mistakes, in the form of inappropriate communication or behaving in ways that are not common for the local setting, is also nearly inevitable and may contribute to (mis)understanding/s. Examples abound of researchers grappling with interaction issues beyond the interview, most often accomplished by way of suggesting mechanical or procedural solutions. For instance, questions are posed about navigating local customs relating to gifts and incentives; trying to adapt to local gender norms; navigating friendship; and so forth.
(Jeutsch, 1998; Twyman, Morrison & Sporton, 2007). The way in which these challenges (or “possibilities”) are addressed is acknowledged as a vital aspect of cross-cultural research as it has a definite influence on the type and degree of access and information a researcher can subsequently enjoy (Moser, 2006). Perhaps the most important lesson here is the need for being open to recognising these challenges as they arise, and maintaining transparency in incorporating them into the research analysis.

Fourth, speaking specifically about a cross-cultural research setting, Sultana (2007) asserts that ethics have to be negotiated daily, that an ethical position is not something achieved with a single decision or action. Her gold standard is to be true to context, relationships, and experiences. Further, alliances and collaborations are forged, rather than the product of an *a priori* agenda (Sultana, 2007). Ethical considerations must not be limited to the minimum standards required by the sponsoring institution, but must (and more importantly) comply with the participants’ standards and cultural requirements (Menzies, 2004). Like Menzies, I could not simply approach individuals and gain permission for research, but had also to approach the governing elders because the knowledge was considered a collective asset rather than individually owned. In Cambodia it was necessary for me to regard relationships as paramount, and to carefully work through the cultural and political authority layers in order to determine a specific research site; and then again once at the site itself. First I had to arrange for a local sponsoring NGO; because of the focus of this research, it was most appropriate this NGO was international. In turn, they linked me to their local NGO partner who wrote a letter of introduction that was subsequently given out during face-to-face meetings with authorities in the Provincial Department of Education, every school in the Cluster, as well as to District and village authorities in the host village and the local police office. It took two weeks of daily
interaction with the School director at Sala Phum to get introduced to possible host family/ies and this was only achieved by the direct intervention of one of the local NGO staff members who had previously worked for MoEYS and thus was a gatekeeper with a foot in both worlds.

In summary, findings, perhaps especially in a cross-cultural research context, will always be interpretive and partial. But it is with the telling of stories that may otherwise not be told and we may reveal broader patterns. Here is the value and a risk worth taking (Sultana, 2007, p. 382).

**Decolonising the research event**

The theoretical montage I employed seemed especially applicable to cross-cultural research, as it served to keep in check “colonizing impulses” (Jones & Jenkins, 2008; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). The various components of my methodological frame also inherently posed Tuhiwai-Smith’s eight essential questions (1999, p. 10):

- Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?

Critical perspective provides a particular historical and political sensitivity that enables recognition and analysis of the influence by multiple actors on multiple levels, some outside the immediate context. Additionally, it does not assume its own validity but constantly questions the categories used to understand social interrelationships. Feminism expands the definition and recognition of legitimate knowledge and knowledge-producers to include marginalised groups and individuals. In addition, its demand for strong objectivity, recognition of intersectionality of identity and relationships, and focus on power will assist in “rethinking collaboration” (Jones & Jenkins, 2008). Feminist approaches seek to be reciprocal and work in terms and ways that facilitate engagement not domination or suppression.
Throughout the inquiry process, I was highly sensitive to the dangerous tendency to Orientalise (Said, 1979) and to revert to the very tropes and discourses I sought to interrogate. I am a product of an imperial education system (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999); I have a Western Judeo-Christian worldview which may subconsciously lead to establishing “the positional superiority of Western Knowledge” (p. 59) within the confines of this research endeavour.

**Research Design and Methods**

This research constitutes an educational ethnography: “the application of anthropological concepts and methods to the study of educational institutions and processes.” Ethnography is “an approach to social research based on the first-hand experience of social action within a discrete location, in which the objective is to collect data which will convey the subjective reality of the lived experience of those who inhabit that location” (Pole & Morrison, 2003, p. 16). An ethnographic approach “places primacy on the importance of situated meaning and contextualised experience as the basis for explaining and understanding social behaviour” (p. 16). Ethnographic techniques of prolonged presence in participants’ setting/s, extended observation, and contextual analysis were employed to determine local meanings. This qualitative research employed participant observation, semi-structured interviews, focus-group discussions (FGD), and heavily visual participatory research activities with children and adults of low literacy levels. Particular attention was paid to the issue of “gender” in all aspects of question formulation, data collection, and information analysis.

**Author’s positioning**

My research draws on eight years of personal experience in Cambodia working as a researcher, educator, and community development consultant. Khmer language ability,
cultural familiarity, relationships with key officials and education-related NGOs, as well as critical awareness of the broader socio-political context of education in Cambodia helped to qualify me to frame and conduct this critical ethnography. However, while these “facts” have obvious benefits for understanding the world and rhetoric of multilateral organisations, the global aid apparatus, and development discourse/s, they also may contain the risk of blurring capacity for critical analysis.

Kapoor (2004) uses Spivak’s work to underscore the importance of development workers employing hyper-reflexivity in representing “the Third World ‘Other’” (p. 644). Kapoor’s conclusion can be applied with equal merit to academic encounters: representations by researchers, by development workers, especially of marginalised Third World groups, are intimately linked to the positioning (socio-economic, gendered, cultural, geographic, historical, institutional) of the researcher. Kapoor suggest that [outsiders] may facilitate the possibility of an ethical encounter with the subaltern through five actions: a) persistent critique of hegemonic representations, b) acknowledging complicity, c) unlearning privilege, d) learning to “learn from below,” and e) active acceptance of research participants’ agency. This process of hyper-reflexivity must begin, of course, long before the researcher begins interacting with research participants.

Some key aspects of my positionality that influenced this research include ethnicity, citizenship, educational attainment, vocation, gender, and worldview. I am Caucasian, Canadian, and formally educated to a level that very few Cambodians, and virtually no rural Cambodians, achieve. This combination assigned me a degree of relational power greater than most of the Khmer participants in this study. As a Caucasian, I am automatically accorded the title “teacher” and a commensurate level of respect. As a Canadian I am perceived as being
very wealthy and lucky, seen as a prosperous patron who is obligated to provide for people within my sphere of influence. As someone with more than 20 years of formal education, and a steady history of paid employment, I could perhaps be regarded as a model of the very Western-style education system that I am interrogating. In addition, I have worked in the NGO development sector in Africa and Asia for 20 years, and could therefore possibly be more deeply influenced by the pervasive modernisation paradigm than the alternative development perspective which I believe is more congruent with my worldview and experience. Further, as a development worker I am to some extent conditioned to fix and improve perhaps more than to listen and facilitate dialogue, to be critical rather than appreciative in orientation; and because I am a specialist in evaluation, it was challenging to not see things through that particular lens in attempts to understand the village setting and attempts at assigning meaning to words and actions of authorities within the MoEYS.

Gender is often considered a crucial aspect of researcher positionality, though it has been my experience in Cambodia that sex/gender is not necessarily a primary referent for non-Khmer in a professional context. That is, because I am not a Cambodian female, I was not expected to comply with the very restricted standards of behaviour applied to Khmer women. I am obviously not male, and thus fit into an “other” category (perhaps regarded as an “honorary male”?) which, happily, afforded me traditionally male privileges such as respect, freedom of movement, and access to formal authorities. However, because I am also [visibly] female, I was allowed traditional female privileges such as meeting with and observing women and children and participating in domestic activities.

A fourth distinct point of note is that I am a Christian, and specifically a Mennonite. While my worldview stands in sharp contrast to that of the majority of Cambodians who are
nominally Buddhist, and predominantly animistic, it does have the distinct advantage of making me sensitive to the spiritual world which is a very immediate and important aspect of life for most Cambodians. As a Mennonite, I am keenly aware of violence as a social (and spiritual) issue and am thus inclined to a strongly reactive desire to intervene when I see it played out. What I would describe as relational violence is very common in Cambodia; but I am aware also that Cambodians themselves may not use the same definition that I do. When living in the village, I had numerous conversations with various family members about their religious and spiritual practices because these are such a visible and vital part of their lives (though almost completely disregarded in mainstream development literature and thinking); when asked in return about my beliefs was transparent about my own Christian faith and practices though I did not attempt to proselytise.

The Christian worldview also contrasts with the secular worldview of many expatriates working in the international development field. It most clearly differs in the ascription of the ultimate source of personal and community transformational change, which is what both groups seek).

**Researcher as patron**

The issue of providing incentives for participation in research is complex and further complicated in Cambodia because of the dominant social system of neo-patrimonialism. Very simplistically stated, in this scheme, (rich) patrons are obliged to support (poor) clients. Rich/poor can be defined according to status, and not solely financial or material wealth. On the advice of Khmer and expatriate colleagues, I did not provide incentives directly to individual participants because (no matter how small or seemingly insignificant the incentive it may arouse feelings of suspicion, competition, jealousy, influence responses by participants,
and even influence the decision of people to participate or not. What could be considered an exception to this is that I paid for all restaurant meals we shared with the Sala Phum school Director – these occurred several times in the month of negotiating for a place to live in the research locale. But, with the exception of Khmer Research Assistants, no one was paid a salary to participate in this research project.

Further, because most of the village level respondents are engaged in subsistence livelihoods, and I recognise the sacrifice of precious time spent in conversation and interviews, I found ways to contribute to groups that I met with, and to the community (and especially the school/s) more generally. For instance, I provided bottled water and locally purchased “snacks” for all participants in all focus group discussions. As an incentive for children to participate in the essay competition, every child who submitted an essay received two pens and an 80-page notebook. And, at the end of the field-work period, as an expression of gratitude for cooperation and time, the RT gave every student and teacher a simple gift pack (toothpaste, toothbrush, bar soap, and pens for students; shampoo, bar soap, notebook, and pens for teachers). Furthermore, as a means of acknowledging cooperation and assistance from the Cluster School, when solicited by the Director, I also gave a donation for the purchase of two concrete benches.

Originally I assumed I would contribute in-kind, time and technical expertise, to teachers or school administrators if requested. However, even though during the field-work period I was frequently requested to provide such support, I intentionally refused because it was clear that to do so would position me in a monitoring and corrective role; and act as reinforcement of the strong orientation toward “foreigners know better.” My research findings, summarised in a Khmer-language document and sent to participants at the research site, as well
as an English-language summary distributed through the strong NGO education-related network in Phnom Penh can also be considered another contribution.

I did pay our host family generously (slightly above market-value) for accommodation and food; additionally, I left with them the simple rattan furniture and some basic kitchen utensils I purchased for myself and the RA to use. Also because of my role as a patron, I was expected to (and complied) give generously at the funerals of mothers of two of the Sala Phum administrators that occurred during the first couple of months in Sala Phum. My RA was also expected to make a contribution commensurate with mine – I gave her funds for that contribution as it represented an unforeseen expense incurred simply because she was working with me (not through any connection or decision of her own). And finally, I was expected to (and did) become involved in assisting the grandchildren of the host family grandmother in finding housing in Phnom Penh, deciding on courses, and so forth.

**Research team**

Two research assistants and, briefly, one translator greatly aided this work. My primary research assistant (RA1), a married female, became pregnant and had to leave the research project shortly after field-work was concluded, so a second assistant (RA2) was employed during the data refinement and checking stage. Additionally, during one week in the village when neither RA was available, I worked with assistance from a male translator. He was single, in his mid-20s, had recently completed an undergraduate degree at a private university in Phnom Penh, and had two years of experience in basic research (running focus group discussion (FGD) and one-to-one interviewing) and verbal translation (Khmer to English). This young man was born and raised in a village in Takeo Province and only came to the capital city after high school, for university studies. These three assistants each brought a
unique perspective to their work, my research project, and through informal interaction (with me and with people in the host family and village), as well as the formal job of translation, each illuminated different aspects of Khmer culture. In addition to these three people, two others (one male, one female both of whom were employed full-time in a research NGO) were contracted to complete some of the interview transcriptions. In all cases it was clear to me that the life experiences of my research assistants had an influence on how they interpreted to me the Khmer world we jointly observed, and that it is not possible to accomplish the job of translation in an objective manner.

RA1 was born in Takeo province in 1984 (age 27 during the time we lived in the village), the fourth child among seven children (five boys, two girls). When she was seven years old, her father died after a protracted fight with an undiagnosed stomach problem. His illness and death rendered the family virtually destitute, though they still had the house and land. Her resourceful mother responded by placing five of her children into a state orphanage in the capital city, Phnom Penh, as a way of improving their life chances. RA1’s description of this in Box 1 below provides a clear view of the perceived value of education as seen from the perspective of impoverished Cambodians.

**Box 1: Importance of formal education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RA1’s view on the importance of formal education</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>JKR:</strong> So, if you think about going to the orphanage now, what do you think is the main reason why your mother sent you to the orphanage?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RA1:</strong> Yeah the main reason was because...before she sent us she explained a lot the reasons why. Even though we were young she kept explaining to us about why she needed us to go there. First she wanted us to go to school – because maybe she already knows she cannot provide all kids to go to school. And second she said “you will have enough food to eat and clothes and books and school supplies. And you will have a place to stay; maybe not a good place but that’s ok.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But she focuses the main thing only for education. She kept telling us “You go to the orphanage and you must to study hard! You must to study hard! You don’t need to care about anything else just study hard.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


RA1’s view on the importance of formal education

And she tried to explain about good future. We were young and don’t know what is good future! But she just telling us about good future *(anakhute la’aḥ)* – if you are educated then you have a good life, you have a good future, you can have a good job, you will be good people and no one will look down on you – something like that. She always explained about the good future even though we didn’t understand what is a good future....She said it many times, these words: “*Tev rien, mien anakhute la’aḥ, some tev rien*,” she always said these words. [lit. go study, you will have future good, please study].

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</table>

RA1 has participated in more formal education than any of her siblings, as she completed Grade 12 and an English-language Bachelor of Law at the (government) Royal University of Law and Economics (RULE). Just one other sibling (eldest brother) completed high school and this was prior to their father’s death. Two siblings dropped out during Grade 11 (second-oldest brother and youngest brother), her older sister dropped out during Grade 10, and her two younger brothers dropped out after failing the national Grade 9 exam. In addition to having earned an undergraduate degree, RA1 is also fluent in English and in Chinese. In all three cases, RA1 was sponsored to study by benefactor/s, a fact which had a direct bearing on her decisions. When asked why she studied Chinese, for example, RA1 responded with the following description.

A woman used to buy flowers from me when I was in the orphanage. At that time she also teaches Chinese in her house. One day I went to deliver the flowers to her house and I heard some children reading Chinese language. And I thought “oh that sounds funny.” But I just keep listening after I give her the flowers. Then one time this aunty asked me “Do you want to study Chinese?” Then I keep smiling a little bit because I did not want to study Chinese, but then I just said ‘Yes!’” I said yes, and she told me I could come to study….This is my beginning with class. (I-P37)

And she explained her decision to study law this way: “Really I wanted to study medicine; but my sponsor said she could only give me money for four years. So I thought what can I do? I know the law degree is four years, so I decided to study law.” (I-P37)
Why does this matter? Because certainly RA1’s upbringing and personal experiences influenced what she saw, and the way that she described events or attributed causes as we lived and worked together in the village. She claims a veritable “rags to riches” story via formal education – a lucky break at the orphanage, sponsored to study Chinese and English, going to university. One other element of RA1’s education that affected her perspective was what she described as a positive experience with corporal punishment. She attributed her own success at least in part, to that. For her own words, see Box 2 below.

**Box 2: Perspectives on the value of corporal punishment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspectives on the value of corporal punishment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RA1 describing the Chinese language class:</strong> At that time I was I was only almost 11 years old that I went to the house class. And I study about one year in the house. And she taught me a lot! And she was so strict lady! Like I if I do something wrong I know she just used the pen just like that [demonstrates that the point of the pen is pushed with some force into the middle of the palm]. Yah, sometimes I could see it go down [the flesh of the palm] and there was blood tik tik [little bit].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RA1 describing how her mother, a formally trained teacher who worked three years teaching in a government school before quitting because she got married, continued on in a teacher role with her own children:</strong> Yeah, after Pol Pot regime she worked as a teacher for a few years. Yeah, yeah that is the reason my first and second siblings can go to school at early age. Because my mum was working at school, my mum just put two of them in school and kept teaching them until...Actually my mum she quit from being a teacher but she still continued to teach all us children. Especially my first brother and second brother. She kept teaching them until high school! And I remember that my mum she taught French to the oldest two...but she was a bit violent and if they not do so well...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JKR:</strong> What would she do to them? Hit them with her hand or a stick or what?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RA1:</strong> Normally she would use a small stick when she taught. Not big stick, it’s small [describes a thin rattan whip]. Just put like that [gestures holding the stick]. [She would say] “So children, be ready to listen carefully!” But for me I remember that she put that stick out and I felt nervous already! And she kept explaining this and that. She taught me about math. And I already was nervous. So I was very careful; but in some part maybe I am too careful so I miss the answer! So she said one time, two times do you get it, do you understand it? And because I was a bit afraid I just said yeah, yeah! Then she gave me homework or exercise to do in front of her, not let me go and do on my own. Because she always sits in front of her children and watch them to do the exercise – you must be done!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It was not surprising to me then, that throughout our time in the village, RA1 consistently expressed a strong belief in the value of hard work, as well as the value of corporal punishment and strictness. Her description of class activity, then, often differed from my own in her choice of adjectives and views on teacher-student interaction.

The second RA was 30 years old, the second child in family with two girls, born and raised in the capital city. She is unmarried and living with her sister and parents in the parent’s home in Phnom Penh. RA2 earned a Bachelor’s degree in Education/English Language Teaching from a government institution (Institute of Foreign Languages at RUPP); and a Master’s degree in Development Management from a private institution (Norton University) where she wrote a thesis on the topic of Domestic Violence and Development. Prior to our time together, RA2 had worked for a non-government agency in the sector of education (promoting mother tongue instruction for indigenous ethnic minorities). It is unusual in Cambodia that at her age she is unmarried; so RA2 and I had long discussions about the social sphere: men, marriage, children, family pressure, domestic violence, the rapid change in the outworking of male-female relationships prior to marriage in urban Cambodia, and so forth. Why does this matter? RA2 is very different from RA1 – she is highly urbanised, more highly educated, had more professional work experience, and her opinions suggested that she was much less influenced by traditional Khmer perspectives and social conventions. Still, I found it fascinating that though highly attuned to gender issues in her own social sphere, it was not natural or automatic for RA2 to turn her analytical gaze to the review of texts and illustrations in the primary school curriculum.
As for the young male translator, he too brought a particular perspective to work in the village. He assumed what I would describe as a blokey role when communicating with adult males; and tended toward taking an imperious tone in interaction with females and children. One informal exchange recorded in my field notes provides an illustration of what I would describe as a typical male view of females in Cambodia (see Box 3 below). That the speaker has completed high school and an undergraduate degree, as well as been exposed to significant Western influence through his work as an English-Khmer translator suggests his utterance is indicative of how tenacious traditional perspectives on gender are held.

**Box 3: Traditional views about gender roles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“It’s not gender, it’s culture...”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One night with RA3 there as my translator, he explodes at me: “A man NEVER rides behind a woman on a motorbike!” (I had suggested that if [a particular host family daughter] took us out to main road next morning to catch a taxi back to Phnom Penh, then he would not be driving the bike but would be riding because I could not imagine [that particular daughter] letting anyone else drive her motorbike ...). “A man belongs in front! A man must drive or people will look down on him! If people see a man on the back riding, people will feel uncomfortable because men should be driving!” Then RA3 utters a classic line that I hear a lot in Cambodia: IT’S NOT GENDER, IT’S CULTURE, as though ‘culture’ excuses oppressive attitudes that define gender roles and norms to the detriment of females. Next day, when the emotion has subsided a bit, I ask again what it means if a man is riding rather than driving a moto with a woman. RA3 informs me that people will think the boy in back is ‘naughty’ and that he is with a ‘prostitute’; or that they are boyfriend/girlfriend and not married and acting inappropriately.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Editorial note to self: *Clearly, appearance matters much in this culture!*

**Research Process**

Prior to travelling to Cambodia, I applied for and received approval for this study from the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board (UBC - BREB). The Certificate Number issued is H10-01376. That process involved serious consideration of ethical issues involved in working with marginalised people, and with children, as well as
issues specifically arising from the unique Cambodian socio-political milieu. For example, with the caveat that I thoroughly explain the purpose of my research including confidential nature of information relayed to me, I received permission to forego obtaining written consent from all respondents on the basis that oral consent is a much more appropriate format in Cambodia. This is because it is not common people of any social status to sign their names to forms except for “official business” (read: government) and often for marginalised populations this has meant the loss of something rather than a benefit (such as land). At village level there was/is the additional issue of literacy – in the focus village and environs, the majority of both women and men were able to sign their names but the majority were also what one described as “uncomfortably literate”, meaning that their reading skills were weak and they were not comfortable deriving meaning from text. Before conducting FGD with children, we obtained permission from both their parents and the Director to involve the children, and also explained the research and asked the children directly for their permission to record them, when we met together. In preparation for the possibility of upsetting children or triggering some previous trauma or discomfort, I had contacted an organisation in Phnom Penh that specialises in counselling for children and received their permission to refer children to them in case it was needed. No children required those services. During the entire research period, no respondent who was approached refused to participate; and there was only a single respondent out of the nearly 200 interviewed who refused to be recorded.

This inquiry process took place in stages over an 18-month period. The first stage involved a period of re-entry Cambodia (after two years in Vancouver completing course work requirements), working as an Adjunct Supervisor at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, and conducting preliminary interviews. At RUPP, I supervised four Khmer students in the
development of their major research projects during their second year of their M.Ed. programme. Significant face-to-face contact time spent talking through basic research concepts and exploring topics unique to each student, provided me with first-hand insight into the difficulties they had with framing their own basic research questions, grappling with the concept of methodological integrity; it was also interesting to hear what they observe as issues worthy of research. One very strong theme that persisted was a request in tacit and explicit form – that I correct their work (ideas) and give them the “right answer”.

During this 5-month period, I hired a Research Assistant (RA) and together we completed archival research at relevant institutions in Phnom Penh. We obtained and catalogued from four major libraries (including the nascent Education Resources Centre (ERC) housed in the Hun Sen Library), citation information on the Khmer language and English documents relevant to my topic of study, as well accessing documentation from the MoEYS EMIS office. In addition, I used this time to develop a comprehensive set of questions for all major stakeholders addressing several key topics: personal educational history and attainment, educational philosophy; perceived purpose of education in Cambodia; educational reform moves (global, local); child-friendly schools (history, evolution, etc.); the relationship between RGC and donor (multilateral) organisations, RGC and NGOs; culture and current form/s of education (clash or congruence); educational quality. See Appendix 2 for a record of the full set of (potential) questions.

Using my question lists, and revising/refining questions based on responses, I completed a round of in-depth interviews with two sets of major stakeholders: five (Khmer) RUPP faculty members and ten expatriates (American, Australian, British, and Filipino), each of whom had ten or more years of experience as an educational practitioner in Cambodia,
though in different sectors including adult education, teacher training for government primary school teachers, theological education, instructor at government university, and NGO education programming. The main purpose of these initial interviews was to provide me with first-hand historical details and impressions of how formal education has changed over time in this country, as well as exploring “outsider” perspectives about local educational philosophy, challenges to Western models and educational constructs, and stories about what pedagogical methods work well and reflections on why this might be.

The second phase consisted of finding and settling into a village; and conducting research *in situ* for a five-month period (roughly one semester). The criteria and process used for site selection is addressed in a later section. As all interviews were completed in the Khmer language and recorded for later translation to English, this represented an enormous quantity of data. Thus, as much as possible I returned to Phnom Penh to use weekends to transcribe interviews. This was also a much-welcomed respite for my pregnant RA so she could spend time with her husband; and, as we were in the village during the hottest time of the year, it proved quite uncomfortable for her.

As much as possible, I attempted to maintain transparency throughout the research process in order to prevent my being drawn into competing political interests within the focus communities. Given that Khmer society is strictly hierarchical, I attempted to be very deliberate and public about inclusion. At the same time, it was imperative to abide as much as possible by culturally appropriate rules of engagement as required and ethically appropriate and occasionally this precluded transparency and required me to act with favouritism.

The third research phase consisted of completing the transcription process, quality checking, and preliminary data analysis to ascertain key themes. Analysis of textbooks was
another time-consuming process that occurred during this phase. The fourth phase consisted of drafting up various sections and checking back with respondents to verify my conclusions and observations. During the third and fourth phases, I intentionally engaged in on-going interaction with education experts in Phnom Penh via participation in monthly EDUCAM\textsuperscript{10} meetings, meetings with expatriate education sector consultants, and informal discussions and email correspondence. I also kept up with my host family usually via telephone; and had the privilege of hosting them in my home when they came to Phnom Penh to visit me.

**Rationale for Child Friendly Schools as research focus**

Among multiple possible foreign-initiated policies currently in effect in Cambodia, CFS was selected as the research focus for four reasons. First, and primarily, CFS is very clearly an “international policy.” Second, the extent of visible support it receives from the RGC/MoEYS suggests genuine local buy-in. Third, the CFS framework embodies several different currently popular strands of international educational discourse (such as student-centred learning, community participation, child rights, gender equality). And fourth, the fact that CFS is being rolled out to the Lower Secondary level indicates that CFS is likely to persist on the Cambodian education scene for many more years.

CFS was initiated by the UN and is funded by a major bilateral donor (Sida). It is strongly supported by two influential non-governmental agency (KAPE is a local NGO and SC-Norway is an international NGO). CFS has been implemented on a national-level pilot basis since 2001, and in December 2007, became a national policy to be gradually rolled out in all schools across the country (MoEYS, 2007). Further, the CFS initiative appears to embody

\textsuperscript{10} EDUCAM stands for “Education Cambodia” and is a sub-group of the larger NGO network Cooperation Committee for Cambodia. The monthly EDUCAM meetings bring together bilateral donors, NGO representatives, academics, and occasionally MoEYS representatives to discuss a variety of education sector issues.
much of what could be considered current primary (mainstream) discourse(s) of international
development (including: child-rights, inclusiveness, effectiveness and relevance/human
capital, gender equity, community participation, good governance, and capacity building). It is
much less clear how far CFS reflects Khmer values and desires.

In Cambodia, CFS began as a pilot in 2001/2 as a tripartite agreement between
UNICEF, MoEYS, and KAPE (Kampuchea Action for Primary Education - a local NGO),
implemented at varying speeds in a small number of schools in six of the nation’s 24 provinces
(in alphabetical order, Kampong Speu, Kampong Thom, Odtar Meanchey, Prey Veng, Stung
Treng, Svay Rieng). In December, 2007 CFS was established as an official policy for

all schools throughout the country in basic education in order to ensure: implementation of child rights which are universally recognised, strengthening the quality and effectiveness of basic education; applying successfully decentralisation system; commitment of the [MoEYS] to achieve the [MDG], the targets of the National Plan for [EFA] and the Education Sector Plan (ESP) and its objectives for national education. (MOEYS, Child Friendly School Policy, 2007)

Accordingly, the CFS has six dimensions, detailed objectives and aims for each are
clearly spelled out in the policy document. Those include: 1) all children have access to
schooling (inclusive schools); 2) effective learning; 3) health, safety, and protection of
children; 4) gender responsiveness; 5) the participation of children, families, and communities in running their local school; and 6) MoEYS supports schools to become more child friendly.

UNICEF and MoEYS have jointly devised a set of workbooks detailing how to implement
these dimensions and how to monitor achievement. The CFS initiative also includes a 6-tiered frame of training and monitoring teams.
**Education level/sector**

Formal “basic education” as defined by the Government of Cambodia consists of grades 1-9: the first six grades are designated “primary” and the next three are known as “lower secondary”. This research focused on the primary school level because these are the grades upon which the government and donors have traditionally focused most attention and the grades most Cambodian who go to school will attend. After Grade 6 there is a considerable attrition (nearly half of all children who enrol drop out before completing Grade 6) so it seems important to obtain perceptions of people who have not yet reached this threshold as they are still actively engaged with the formal education system. More specifically, we worked predominantly with participants associated with Grades 4-6 for reasons explained in the section below called *Research participants*.

**Location/geography**

Schools in Cambodia are usually classified as “urban”, “rural”, or “remote” and “complete” (offering the full complement of Grades 1-6, 1-9, or 1-12) or “incomplete” (offering partial set of grades, such as 1-3 or 1-5). This research focused on one rural school Cluster (ten schools in total) in Kampong Cham provinces. The rationale for looking at rural enactment of education is that the vast majority of Cambodians live rural, agrarian lives and therefore a large majority of Cambodia’s children attend rural schools. We worked with complete schools because there are more complete than incomplete schools in Cambodia\(^\text{11}\) and based on the assumption that complete schools will have fewer logistical/material factors that might adversely influence educational practice.

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\(^\text{11}\) “While most villages in Cambodia have a primary school, 40.5 percent [of primary schools] are incomplete – 25.1 percent in urban areas, 39.1 percent in rural areas, and 78.7 percent in remote areas” (World Bank, 2005, p. 34).
In the MoEYS CFS Master Plan 2007-2011, provinces are distinguished not by quality, but essentially by exposure to/experience with CFS, as “provinces with existing high levels of support” (12), “other provinces with PTTC’s + Kep, Pailin” (9) and “Remote Provinces” (3).\(^\text{12}\) Criteria for selection include: distance from provincial capital (at least 60 km.); age of school (at least 10 years in operation); complete school; and duration of exposure to CFS ideas and donor support (~10 years).

**Research participants**

Research was restricted to working with ethnic Khmer people (as self-identified, with first/home language as a primary basis of determination). The Khmer comprise about 90 percent of the population in Cambodia (Kosonen, 2005). Cambodia is one of the least ethno- and linguistically diverse countries in the region – an estimated 22 languages are spoken in Cambodia with this diversity present primarily among indigenous ethnic minorities who are small in number, and most of whom live in five “remote” provinces. The largest minority language speaking populations – Cham, Chinese (Mandarin speakers), and Vietnamese – are estimated in the hundreds of thousands. The national language, and language of instruction in all government schools, is Khmer. There are a small number of schools (located primarily in highly urbanised areas) that use another language as the medium of instruction – such as Vietnamese, Thai, and Chinese. However, most of these are not officially recognised institutions.

\(^{12}\) According to the EMIS, there are 12 “provinces with existing high levels of support” (Kampong Thom, Kampong Speu, Prey Veng, Svay Rieng, Stung Treng, Otad Meanchey, Kampong Cham, Kampong Chnang, Phnom Penh, Prey Vihear, Pursat, Siem Reap). There are 9 “other provinces with PTTC’s + Kep, Pailin” (Banteay Meanchey, Battambang, Kampong, Kandal, Kratie, Takeo, Sihanoukville, Pailin, Kep). And 3 are designated as “Remote Provinces” (Koh Kong, Mondulkiri, Ratanakiri).
The research focused on stakeholders associated with grades 4-6. I chose to work with children in these grades because based on previous experience I found that children in this age-range are clearly able to engage in the necessary self-reflection required to articulate full and thoughtful responses to questions from a foreigner. To facilitate responses from children during focus groups, researchers used a variety of participatory activities for children including drawing and explaining pictures, telling stories, playing active games, priority ranking with candies, and essay writing. Among the respondents were ~115 different children (60 girls) attending grades 4-6 at Sala Phum Primary. Several key individuals, such as Sala Phum teachers and administrators, were interviewed multiple times on different, though related issues or themes. The team also observed classroom teaching and school yard behaviour at SPPS (35 classroom sessions of 1-1.5 hrs.) and five other schools in the Seksa Cluster (observed 32 classes of 1-1.5 hrs. and interviewed 25 teachers, 13 female).

In total, data was collected through 161 interview events (individual, FGD) with 326 different respondents (176 females) representing nine major stakeholder groups (RUPP, NGO, MoEYS, expatriate educators and advisors, local authorities, villagers, teachers, parents and caregivers, students). While the bulk of data came from conversations, interviews, focus group discussions, and observation, and secondarily from documentary resources such as NGO reports, evaluations, and publications, the research team also pursued additional data sources. These included a voluntary essay competition intended to elicit information about the daily reality and future dreams of students; a review of student progress books which teachers send home for parents to review monthly; review of a year’s set of official reports submitted to MoEYS; and “teacher checklist results” (used by the District Training and Monitoring Team
Finally, researchers also analysed textbook illustrations and narrative in 12 texts (all four subjects for grades 4-6) to further illuminate gender-related values and perceptions.

**Matrix for analysing the practice of Child Friendly Schools**

The fact that Child Friendly Schools is a multi-dimensional concept complicated my analysis. My research attempts to provide a thick description of the everyday practice of CFS as recited and rehearsed by practitioners. It was not intended to be an evaluation of the efficiency or effectiveness of CFS against globally defined standards; it intentionally did not use the official MoEYS Monitoring Frame; rather it sought to understand and describe how practitioners themselves understand and use CFS, and to begin answering the question of why practice occurs as it does.

Specifically I developed an analytical matrix in order to guide the research process through the layered maze of policy and practice, and to facilitate data analysis and presentation. The matrix, Figure 2 below, is not causal so much as temporal (showing development of categories as this occurred over time) and should be understood as an open network in that it is not intended to show hierarchy or specific sequence. Initially I reviewed the overarching administrative frame in which CFS occurs including: the school’s physical environment, curriculum and scheduling, teacher profiles, as well as school management, administration, and monitoring systems. With this contextual frame in place, I was then able to focus on describing and analysing teacher perceptions of CFS; classroom enactment of CFS; parental involvement in schools; and gender through policy analysis, teacher and student views, and textbook analysis. A plethora of additional detail was generated under each of these four main categories of focus.
Details on Data Collection Tools

Throughout the inquiry period, I developed and used multiple data collection tools. In addition to this, the RT accessed and analysed government documents and data generated by the school itself (monitoring records, reports filed with the government, official correspondence, and so forth). The main tools and data sources used are briefly outlined in Table 2 below.
Table 2: List of data sources and data generation tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of tools/sources used for generating &amp; collecting data</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. EMIS – analysis of statistical data from MoEYS.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Question lists for all stakeholder/s – individual interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD).</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Classroom observation checklist.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Playground observation checklist.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Analysis of Student Progress Books.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Analysis of school records and reports.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. PRA activities with students (applied during FGD).</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. PRA Activities with parents/caregivers (applied during FGD).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Essay competition for Grade 4-6 students at Sala Phum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Student FGD protocol for discussion on gender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. FGD protocol for use with teachers/administrators on gender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Gender analysis frame for analysing Grade 4, 5, 6 Math, Khmer Language, Social Studies, and Science textbooks (narrative and illustrations).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Posing “Khmer epistemology” as a question – physical arrangement of pieces of a puzzle and discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Compilation of key data lists (for things such as slogans on school compounds and classrooms, games on playground and child-play in village, key Khmer terms relating to “learning”, education proverbs, etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Focus groups with students, organised by class and sex-specific groups, provided a significant amount of data. We also conducted short interviews (~10 minutes) with individual children at another time, to verify classroom observations. Children in the FGD were asked a series of questions around four main themes: 1) why do children attend school, what benefits do they think it will bring?; 2) what do the students like/dislike about school and classroom activity?; 3) what characteristics do children appreciate in their teachers?; and 4) in an effort to understand what kinds of pedagogy children respond well to, we asked children to list all the activities they do in a classroom and then discuss and rank according to various criteria posed by the RT. To facilitate reflection on these questions, the RT incorporated some participatory activities. See Appendix 3 for precise details.
Also with students in Grades 4-6, the Research Team ran a voluntary essay competition. After receiving a briefing from the RT about the purpose of the essay and instructions, teachers announced the competition to their own Grade 4-6 classes and subsequently took responsibility to collect essays and submit them to the RT. Class 4A, 5A, 5A were assigned the question: *Please describe in as much detail as you can, an ordinary school day.* Class 4B, 5B, 6B were assigned the question: *What is your favourite subject and why is that your favourite subject?* The purpose of getting children to write about these two topics was to generate information about their daily lives (activities, relationships, interests, dislikes, struggles, how they perceive learning occurs at home vs. the classroom, etc.) and about their formal educational goals and future career and livelihood aspirations. The RT’s aim was to use this tool in an effort to better understand how children conceptualise formal education as fitting into their everyday lives, and their future. In fact, the essay process probably revealed more about existing educational norms than the actual content of the essays.

To guide classroom observations, both the RA and PR completed a checklist on most days in the classroom (see Appendix 4). Questions on the checklist related to class commencement, preparation/planning, approaches to teaching and learning, materials and resources used, classroom activities, timing, assessment, and classroom management. Notes about the physical environment were done separately, and just during the first month or so, and thus not included on the checklist. Researchers also used a question frame, shown in Table 3 below, to assist in observation of playground and recess activities. Information from this observation exercise also contributed toward understandings about gender perceptions and socially prescribed behaviour for girls and for boys.
Table 3: Playground activity question frame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions to guide playground/break-time observations</th>
<th>Notes/observations/Questions (BOYS / GIRLS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questions/areas to observe</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What activities do children engage in at break-time (games, reading, library, buying snacks, talking to friends, homework, other, etc.)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Notice if activities are sex-differentiated (do more boys than girls do particular things, or vice versa? Why might this be the case?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Who plays particular games (if anyone)– just boys? just girls? Both boys and girls? What do boys/girls do separately and what do they do together?).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What games do children (differentiate according to boys / girls) play (name of game; rules; rowdy or sedate; primarily challenging in mental or in physical manner; etc.)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Note the degree of imagination (vs. formality &amp; structure) required by specific games.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Assess the quality of interaction amongst the students – do children appear to talk well with each other, to get along, etc.? Are some children taking the role of ‘bully’?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What level / type of interaction is there, if any, between children and adults during break-times?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What do adults do at the break-time, and where (in their own classroom, on their side of the compound, in the main office, etc.).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Is there any intervention by adults in playground activities?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To obtain ideas and information from teachers the research team utilised focus group discussions but relied more heavily upon a series of in-depth individual interviews, frequent class observation, informal conversation around the village after school. Another exercise used with all teachers (and during some of the FGD with caregivers) during one of their multiple interviews, was exploring their perspectives on epistemology in a visual manner. The RT gave to various respondents four pieces of paper each with a single word written (in Khmer) on it: “teacher,” “student,” “knowledge,” and “learning.” Respondents were then asked to organise the papers to reflect how they perceive the process of learning to occur. Once this was done, respondents were then asked to explain their rationale for organising the paper/concepts in that
way; and then asked additional questions about the nature of ‘knowledge’ (that is, according to their way of understanding, is it static or dynamic?). For school administrators, in-depth individual interviews were a major source of information. Additionally, together with school administrative staff, the RT drew a rough map of the school compound/s, and identified donors (as well as the process of securing donation) and the years for construction or inclusion of specific elements of the school’s facilities (wells, classroom buildings, kitchen, bathroom blocks, trees, stone benches, gazebo, fish pond, etc.). One of the main reasons for doing this exercise was to contribute to understanding of the scope and level of community involvement in Sala Phum Primary School. The exercise also contributed to information about the actual cost of education in Cambodia, the priorities of school administrators, and so forth.

The RT engaged with parents and student caregivers primarily through focus group discussions organised by village (detailed in Table 4 below) – that is, one FGD held with parents in each of the four catchment villages comprising Sala Phum’s responsibility. In addition, many parents and caregivers living in the host village were also interviewed at length in their homes.

Table 4: Protocol for group discussions with parents/caregivers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permission: Introduction &amp; obtain permission for recording</td>
<td>Comply with best practice ethical standards; put caregivers at ease with the recorder and the somewhat formal nature of the gathering.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brainstorm, have volunteer write on flip-chart paper, ranking.</td>
<td>Question 1: Why do you send your children to school? What do you hope they will learn? What kinds of skills and attitudes do you want them to get from school?</td>
<td>To determine the congruence between local, rural aspirations for formal education and those expressed by MoEYS and in international rhetoric about CFS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set up a chart – volunteer writes as participants</td>
<td>Question 2: What are the benefits of education to the child, family, village, society, and nation?</td>
<td>Information re: local perspectives on what the purpose of education is; why do people send their kids to school, often at great cost?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parents and caregivers – activities for general focus group discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>discuss.</td>
<td><strong>Question 3</strong>: Where are other sources of these things you want for your children (skills, attitudes, etc.)? [For instance – temple (wat), family, elders, television, etc.]</td>
<td>Discern traditional Khmer forms of education and teaching, and epistemology. By determining with greater clarity what traditional forms are, it will be possible to compare with international discourse and perhaps arrive at a more moderate middle way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion only.</td>
<td><strong>Question 4</strong>: Do you know any old proverbs related to education? If no response, can prompt with: what about the proverb about “eyes/bones” – what do you think of that one?</td>
<td>Discern traditional Khmer forms of education and teaching, and epistemology. I understand Cambodia to be an oral society with concomitant social and communicative constructs. Thus, proverbs and sayings give insight into deeply held values and social relations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional questions (for break-time, if time available, etc.):
1. Has anyone heard of CFS?
2. Has anyone attended any meetings at their school? If so, what was the purpose of the meeting, who attended, etc.

Gender in focus

One of the major aims of this research was to consider the extent to which education practitioners in Cambodia are responding to global narratives about gender (gender, gender equality, gender and education). Thus the research team facilitated discussion specific to these issues, both with students (in sex-specific FGD) and with teachers and administrators (individually, as well as in sex-specific FGD).

The protocol used during group discussions with children (see Table 5) differed somewhat from that used with adults, focusing more on how the children see the activities of their own sex vis-à-vis the other sex. For both child and adult FGD, when using flipchart paper to record responses, participants expended enormous energy perfecting spelling and wording. In fact, this often took precedent over actually responding to the questions posed by the RT. In one of the female student FGD, one girl had volunteered to write but the others...
in the group spent so much time correcting her and arguing together about spelling and wording that they completely forgot the question and some participants ended up in tears. Eventually we gave up with the student volunteer and the RA took responsibility for recording responses on the paper.

Table 5: Protocol for student (child) group discussions about gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protocol for student (child) focus group discussion about gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> To better understand from child perspective, local conceptions of gender – culturally/socially prescribed attributes of males/females in school context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Play introduction name-game at the beginning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Play “land/sea game” at break.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 1:</strong> What do you think are characteristics of a “good girl”/ “good boy”?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Divide into two groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Sharing a single piece of flip-chart paper, ask each group to select one volunteer to draw a picture of a male / female on their respective sides of the paper (or can have several kids in each group drawing, as they wish).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Ask kids to stay in same groups around the flipchart paper and begin listing the qualities of good girl / good boy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ When time is up, have the 2 groups compare and discuss their answers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 2:</strong> What chores and activities do boys do at home? What chores/activities do girls do at home? Are there any differences in what girls/boys do @ home? Why do think there are differences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Brainstorm as a group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Ask probing questions as we go along.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 3:</strong> What chores do girls/boys do at school? Are there differences; if so, why? What are the reasons that children think boys are assigned certain tasks and girls are assigned certain tasks? Do girls and boys behave the same or differently during class time? Can you explain the differences? Why do you think this is?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Write on flipchart as we go along.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question 4:</strong> What games do kids play at break-time? Are some games just for girls, just for boys, for both? Why is this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Brainstorm as one group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Write down the game names and discuss them as we go along.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Then discuss whether boys play or girls or both.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Ask: why / why not (do girls / boys participate)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For adult respondents, we posed questions around three key themes: differences for male and female teachers/administrators relating to school, differences relating to classroom practice, and differences relating to curriculum. See Table 6 below for specific sub-questions.

**Table 6: Protocol for group discussions with teachers/administrators on gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FGD protocol with teachers/administrators on gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong> Explore with teachers, perceptions of differences (and similarities) between males/females as it relates to education and teaching practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Questions &amp; Activities (get volunteer to write in table on flipchart; use 10-seeds method for ranking when appropriate):</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Question 1: Differences relating to ‘school’ in general.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Main qualities that male/female teachers bring to their work? Same or different?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Are there different challenges for male teachers / female teachers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do teachers play a different role for children at school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- At their school, why are there so many female teachers and so few females in administration (none).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Question 2: Differences relating to ‘classroom’ practices.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Who is easier to teach, boys or girls? Or same?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Who does what [task, subject, activity, etc.] better?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Who is better behaved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Who is school easier for?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Is it good to mix boys/girls (such as for group work)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Question 3: Differences relating to curriculum.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do you teach about male/female differences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What subjects? What level does this start?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How are males/females portrayed in the curriculum?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What about pictures in the text book ...?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to eliciting information during focus group discussions, given the potential of school to be a site of hegemonic reproduction through systems and texts, the research team analysed all 12 of the national textbooks for grades 4-6, three subjects/books per grade. This review occurred in two stages. The first step consisted of providing a general description of narrative content and illustrations, as well as information about broad themes and patterns relating to how males and females are portrayed. The second step was to narrow in on language and action related to gender. General instructions (see Appendix 5) were provided in writing.
to the RA and also discussed at length face-to-face. In addition, the RA was instructed to attempt to help bridge the language gap between Khmer and English. Specifically, she was instructed to note pronouns and gender-indicated common nouns used in the text (such as mother, father, king, etc.). She was to identify the nature of adjectives used to describe males and females and to ascertain whether there was an observable pattern in language use.

I was somewhat surprised that the very concept that printed material could be biased in some way, and less than a full picture of reality, met with some resistance from the RA. “The books just tell us history and facts,” she protested, “they tell us the way things are.” This necessitated addition of more explicit questions to the general list which is included as Appendix 5. The RA then independently constructed a preliminary content analysis table. At another time, the textbooks were discussed by the primary researcher (PR) and RA page-by-page and the analysis table modified by the PR according to discussion.

In all cases, the Khmer RA’s view on whether or not the persons illustrated, or implied in narrative, were male or female, took precedent over the primary researcher’s perspective. A few times RA2 indicated that she definitely understood a character to be male/female because of how their actions were described, though the character’s name was neutral. For instance, in the Grade 4 Khmer text (p. 3) a father teaches his child named Narin (neutral name signifying neither male nor female) to swim; then later Narin saves another child from drowning. The RA explained: “In this story, it feels like Narin should be a boy, though we don’t know from the name, because Narin is taught to swim well. And Narin is strong and brave to help a kid who

13 Khmer pronouns differ from English in that they are specific to context and individuals. Khmer has a gender-neutral third person singular pronoun, koat (she/he) used for both/either male/female subjects. Kay is the (gender-neutral) plural version of the singular koat. So when koat and kay are used, the reader does not necessarily know the sex of the subject. Thus references to male or female are more specific in Khmer than in English. Another example of this is that occupation titles are gender-neutral as well. For instance, “kru” is “teacher”. The prefix lok is added when referring to a male teacher (lok kru); and prefix “neak” for female teacher (neak kru).
was drowning – those are male traits in Cambodia, so Narin must be a boy.” In the same textbook, a lesson about “Safety in sports and games” (p. 10) does not specify gender in the text but the activities described, in the opinion of RA2, “clearly are boys’ sports – football [soccer], chess, playing with fireworks, climbing trees.” The accompanying illustration features seven children, of which two are female. One girl is playing jump rope, one girl is climbing a tree with a boy. As a third illustration of this point, in the Grade 5 Khmer text (p. 159) portrays a child trying to construct a cart using a chair and wheels provided by father. Though no sex is specified in text or picture for the child, the RA said that she assumed it was a boy “because boys invent things, boys make things.”

During this discussion, I was attuned for information about two other themes vital to this research: first, what was the extent/degree/nature of “local content” – to what extent was content (and portrayal) “Khmer” or “Cambodian” or “other”? The second theme was the extent to which major CFS principles and ideals (such as inclusiveness, tolerance of difference, health and safety, child participation, gender equality, family and community participation in school, government support, human rights/child rights) are promoted, complied with, contradicted, and so forth.

Data analysis

Primary data was collected over an eight month period which included one semester (five months) of time living in Phum Beye village). During this period the two-person research team (both females, one expatriate and one Khmer) conducted 161 interview events (individual, group, FGD) with 326 different respondents (176 female) representing nine major stakeholder groups (students, parents and caregivers, host family, teachers and school
administrators, local authorities, NGO staff, MoEYS at provincial and central level, representatives of multilateral agencies, and expatriate educators).

**Overview of data analysis.** Research in Khmer was conducted by a team of two at any given time though team composition changed. Unless interviewing expatriates, I worked with a Khmer counterpart to facilitate linguistic and cultural comprehension. Most of the 161 interview events were conducted in Khmer. All interviews were recorded, and transcribed from audio files directly to English. Key words and themes were then identified from the English transcripts. For Khmer interviews, a Khmer native speaker then returned to the original audio files to produce an exact Khmer rendering of key phrases I had highlighted, in order to facilitate understanding of “meaning.” These key words, themes, and concepts were then discussed at length. Occasionally an alternate Khmer speaker very familiar and experienced in the education sector was approached about issues to provide more objective insight. I worked with hard copies of all transcripts and observation notes to conduct a manual analysis that generated major themes. Once themes had been identified, and then consolidated into the English language version of transcripts and notes, interviews were then entered into Atlas.ti 6 for further refinement and analysis.

**Detailed description of data analysis process.** I used a generally inductive approach to analyse the qualitative data generated in the process of this inquiry, because such approaches “are intended to aid an understanding of meaning in complex data through the development of summary themes or categories from the raw data” (Thomas, 2003, p. 3). More specifically, I used “constant comparison analysis” perhaps the most commonly used form of analysis for qualitative data (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007, p. 565).

To perform a constant comparison analysis, the researcher first reads through the entire set of data (this also could be a subset of the data). After doing so, the
researcher chunks the data into smaller meaningful parts. Then, the researcher labels each chunk with a descriptive title or a “code.” The researcher takes pains to compare each new chunk of data with previous codes, so similar chunks will be labeled with the same code. After all the data have been coded, the codes are grouped by similarity, and a theme is identified and documented based on each grouping.

The process of identifying themes from speech was iterative, one of continuous revision and refinement. That is, it required multiple readings of interview transcripts and notes, and repeated consideration of the multiple themes arising in order to collapse them into a smaller number of categories and eventually arrive at an understanding of key elements in a particular (Cambodian) perception of Child Friendly Schools, as well as a more general typology of responses to global educational discourse/s. My analysis process, detailed as follows, roughly adhered to the 14-stage process for analysing interview transcripts described by Burnard (1991).

All formal interviews (with one exception) and focus group discussion events were recorded after obtaining permission from the participants. During the interview events, I took notes both on the content of discussion as well as noting observations about the respondents’ informal talk, voice inflection, and body language (e.g. “appeared hesitant to answer” or “was very excited when talking about…”). I also made notes to enable me to connect information between interviews (e.g. “this is the only teacher who describes corporal punishment as negative”). In addition to looking for general similarities, I also used divergent views (negative cases, outliers) to challenge and inform analysis of data (Bazeley, 2009). For an example of how an informal discussion (i.e. conversation not directly responding to research-related questions) informed my analysis, see Box 4 below.
Box 4: Example of researcher observation informing data analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example of researcher observation informing data analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In one case (female Grade 4 teacher, I-P59) the teacher rescheduled her interview because she had to seek medical treatment. When I interviewed her on the later date, I inquired after her health. She said she was feeling better, but did not know the cause of her illness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I asked if this teacher had asked her doctor any questions about the possible causes she laughed and said: “You cannot ask any questions of doctors in Cambodia! If you do, they will get angry that you question them and they may refuse to treat you in the future! Therefore, I am not brave enough to ask.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My notes-to-self read as follows: “Interesting reflection on fear and confrontation in different spheres of influence: students are afraid to ask questions of teachers, teachers are fearful of asking questions to physicians. Hierarchy example?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As this exchange occurred during one of the first interviews with teachers at Sala Phum, combined with information from my literature review it alerted me to the issue of hierarchy as a general social ordering, as well as a potentially major variable in the education equation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

English language interviews were transcribed by me, the primary researcher. Khmer language interviews were transcribed from Khmer directly to English by four different RAs (given the volume of work and time constraints, I was unable to find one RA who could do all of the transcripts). It would have been optimal to have had interviews transcribed directly into Khmer, and then from Khmer into English – however this was not possible because of insufficient time and finances. The English transcriptions were set up in a prescribed table format to facilitate coding. This table contained four columns as follows: speaker, narrative, coding (category, theme), and notes. Thus each transcription from Khmer interview events contained the content of three main stakeholders – me as the primary interviewer, the RA who facilitated interviews, and the respondent/s. That is, I did not assume the RAs gave literal or exact rendering of my questions to the respondent/s (because Khmer differs significantly from

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14 Categories of response were eventually collapsed into major themes. Major themes (determined by intensity and frequency) were then used to form and prioritise distinct sections within Chapters 5, 6, and 7 as well as became the basis for identifying and defining the typology of five different responses of Cambodian educators to global education discourses.
English, conceptually), and I did assume that the respondent/s were answering the RA’s rendering of queries rather than my exact questions. During the actual interview events with Khmer speakers, my Khmer language ability enabled me to adapt the RA’s question/s when her/his Khmer did not capture the essence of my question, and also to seek clarification directly from respondents if I did not understand, or needed additional details. See Box 5 below for examples of how Khmer and English questions diverged, in most cases appropriately but in a few instances, in a way that required correction.

**Box 5: Examples of differences between English and Khmer language questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example in difference between English / Khmer questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Acceptable:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JKR: Okay, is that [pinching the children for discipline] effective?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RA: So after you pinch the children, do the children listen to you or not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JKR: So, she is saying that what she knows as being Child Friendly is all in those red books?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RA: So, according to your idea, does Child Friendly Schools follow the teaching based on those red books?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Required correction:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JKR: What is the biggest challenge for education in Cambodia?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RA: The students challenge and compete with each other in their study. So according to your observation what subjects do they compete with each other in?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JKR: So the first question is relating to female teachers and male teachers: Do you think that male/female teachers have different qualities or characteristics? Do male/female teachers bring different things to the classroom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RA: Her first question to you all is – do men and women teacher have a different level of knowledge or the same? Or what resources and knowledge (tone tien neung chomnay dung) do men teachers bring into classroom? And what resources do women teachers bring into?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once interviews were transcribed into English, I cleaned the data by simultaneously listening to the recorded interview (Khmer) and reading the transcript (English), making corrections and notes in the process. In most cases, I did this together with an RA so we could together improve the accuracy of the English version transcript as well as make it more readable for speakers of English (the primary audience for English language doctoral dissertations). Where I was unfamiliar with a particular Khmer word or phrase directly
pertaining to the research topic, I specifically sought clarification from an RA and Khmer-language dictionary, and in this process developed a key word list that helped bring consistency to translation.

Upon completion of data cleaning, I went back through the interviews to identify major themes, categories, and images. This was done manually, in the form of colour-coding throughout the interview documents and organising data segments (quotes) onto flipchart paper. As is common with qualitative data, a considerable amount of text was not assigned to any category as it was considered to be not relevant to the research objectives (Thomas, 2003, p. 5). An excellent example of this is the extensive description by most teachers of their lives during and immediately post-Khmer Rouge regime (depending on teachers’ age). Such narrative was essentially summarised as “trauma” and also informed the “teacher profile” section of the research write-up.

In some cases a response narrative was coded into more than one category. For an example of this, see Box 6 below which contains an excerpt from an interview with a Grade 4 female teacher (I-P62) at Sala Phum.

**Box 6: Example of preliminary analysis process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I-P62</td>
<td>Regarding CFS, if the children pay attention it is easy for them to understand. If I compare to the time when I studied, the children now are more clever. But not all children are more clever. Those students who don’t understand [weak] are really weak. They don’t pay attention so they don’t learn. They play a lot.</td>
<td>Effective teaching &amp; learning. Then/now. Blaming. Onus for learning.</td>
<td>• Onus for learning is on students. • Then/now comparison. • Teacher makes allowance for different levels of ability (karma? Inherent ability?) • Teacher blames students for not learning/low scores. • Then/now (era of education contrasted).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Example of preliminary notes early in the analysis process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|         | This differs from my time of study. It was different for our generation – if we think about study at that time, teachers forced students to study. But now, students are allowed to play a lot. Academically weak children play, they are happy with playing so they do not learn, do not understand the lessons. | Child rights discourse – ambivalence.       | ▪ Moral decline (?) deterioration in behaviour of youth.  
▪ Child rights discourse seen as negative (?).  
▪ Blaming students for not learning – teacher not taking responsibility. |

Stakeholder checking was conducted progressively throughout the period of field-work, in formal and informal ways (Thomas, 2003, p. 70). Four of the procedures employed were: 1) summarising responses at the end of an interview and asking for immediate correction to facts or interpretation, 2) intentionally organising sequential interviews so that respondents could verify information and understandings from prior interviews and the interviewer could ask for clarification on classroom and playground observations undertaken in the meantime, 3) conducting informal conversations with members of education-focused NGOs, and 4) providing preliminary drafts of findings to Khmer and expatriate education specialists for their feedback.

**Data Access, Security, Storage**

As per UBC’s ethics requirements, only myself and my Supervisory Committee members had access to all of the research data all of the time. All respondents were told that they could access their own data upon request; however, not one person requested a written version of the transcript produced from their interview. The Research Assistants and three additional transcribers had access to partial data periodically, in the course of fieldwork and for
translation purposes. However, the data (hard copy/soft copy) was always stored with me and when joint analysis or use of the data was necessary, as much as possible researchers generated only the pieces of data required for that particular exercise. Digital photos taken of all participatory research visuals generated by this research were also stored on my computer. The original plan was to store the visuals produced during FGD in an appropriate community-accessible location (such as the commune council office or the village chief’s office). When repeated attempts to garner interest in these data sources failed, I stored them in Phnom Penh.

All data (soft-copy written documents, digital images, audio-files) were stored on my personal password-protected computer. One full set of back-up copies was made regularly on an external hard drive, and stored with a professional colleague who does not have any connection whatsoever to this research. Another set was stored on a cloud server. As per UBC policy, the data generated by this project will be kept for five years within a UBC facility. It is my intention/plan to destroy the data at the end of this storage period, by shredding any paper copies and deleting computer files (including audio and image files). It is my intention to destroy the data in such a way that ensures confidentiality.

**Description of Research Site/s**

As described elsewhere, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are actively engaged in design, delivery, and policy-making for the Cambodian education sector. Thus, this research was done in cooperation with a local and an international NGO that have long partnered with each other, to facilitate access and accountability, ensure relevance, and promote dissemination of findings.

The two main criteria for school selection were that it be in a rural setting because the majority of Cambodia’s 6,665 primary schools are located in rural areas (UNESCO-IBE,
and secondly, that the school have extensive experience with the concept and practice of CFS. The partnering NGOs were asked to identify school/s that they considered to be “successful” and “exemplary” in implementation of CFS. Kampong Cham was immediately identified as the target province; eventually the partnering NGOs suggested the Seksa Cluster and then Sala Phum Primary School (SPPS). Sala Phum Primary received CFS-specific assistance from 2000 to 2009. CFS input focused on two grades per year so that by 2005 all teachers had received intense CFS-related input and all classes were considered “Child Friendly” by the local NGO’s assessment. Additionally, the SP School Director also informed the research team that his school was “developed”, the highest possible ranking according to the CFS policy which delineates a 3-tier ranking of schools as basic or preparatory, medium, and developed.

Sala Phum Primary School (SPPS) is located in Phum Beye, part of the Seksa Cluster School group, in one District of Kampong Cham Province, located within 200 km. of the capital city, Phnom Penh. Sala Phum Primary School catchment area includes four villages (phum): Phum Beye, Phum Daem Chev, Phum Ko, and Phum Tek. SPPS has classes from kindergarten to Grade 6. The total number of students enrolled in grades 1-6 at the time of research was 321 (168 girls). Staff at Sala Phum during the research period totalled 18 people: three male administrators (Director, Vice Director, Secretary) who were not involved in teaching, one female librarian, and 14 teachers (10 Females). The researchers did not interview or observe the two kindergarten teachers to the same extent as other staff because they are supported by the community rather than the government.

To protect the privacy of the respondents, all names and locations were given pseudonyms to render them anonymous. Sala Phum literally means “village school”; Seksa literally means “study”. Names used for villages are also pseudonyms: beye literally means “cooked rice,” daem chev literally means “tree,” ko literally means “cow,” and tek literally means “water”.

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165
Sala Phum Primary has a significantly lower pupil-teacher-ratio (PTR) than is the norm for rural Cambodian schools. The national average is ~48 while at Sala Phum the ratio was ~27 students per classroom. Another unusual feature of the research site is that all teachers are originally from one of the four catchment villages surrounding the school.

Host family

In many respects my host family was an ideal research site, both in terms of the agrarian lifestyle they led (“typically Cambodian”: growing rice and seasonal vegetables, semi-mechanised, rely on prov dat (communal labour)) and because its members exhibited a range of demographic characteristics that also typify rural-dwelling Cambodians today. Yeit (grandmother) Hooey is the family’s matriarch – her husband died about ten years ago. They had ten children, one of which died before age five. The other nine are flourishing, four unmarried and five married. Three unmarried daughters live with their mother. The youngest child is a daughter who works in a shoe factory in a nearby town. She was away from home six days a week from 6 am to 9 pm working as a quality control clerk for USD $61/week. With overtime pay, she earned up to $100 in a week. This daughter completed Grade 7 and started Grade 8, but dropped out because “the school was far and it was difficult to travel and our living conditions were lacking/poor. So I decided to stop” (I-P24). In fact, it appears that her decision was a collective one made by the family rather than an independent choice - her role in the family was to earn cash and to fill in for family emergencies. One example of this is when she was told by her mother to leave the factory work in order to go live in Koh Kong province to assist at an older sister’s breakfast shop when that older sister had health issues.

16 Like in many Asian cultures, in Cambodia people use kinship terms to address each other rather than using a person’s given name. These terms can be used to show deference (or the opposite) and they illustrate an existing social hierarchy. This hierarchy is sometimes a reflection of birth order and kin relations, while other times it is based on more complicated social constructs.
The next child, a daughter, is a Grade 1 teacher at Sala Phum. She recently moved back to her village after teaching for two years at a school in a neighbouring district. She found it too expensive to live away from home. Now she is studying full-time on weekends for a bachelor’s degree in math instruction at a private university in the provincial capital of Kampong Cham.

The next sibling, another daughter, is considered the *may p’teah*, or “household head” as she is the one primarily responsible for running the farm, compound, and household. She dropped out of school after completing Grade 4. Conversation revealed a combination of factors that precipitated this decision: she was over-age when she started so she was physically bigger than her classmates, and they had already started learning to read so “I felt shy to study with them”; transportation was difficult as the family had only a single bicycle to share among the children; and “at that time my father was sick and I was lazy (*kechel*)” so I stopped studying” (I-P28). One of Yei’s two sons, an unmarried, taciturn man of 34 years, also lives in the house. He is responsible for contributing physical labour to the family’s agricultural pursuits. He completed seven years of schooling and dropped out in the eighth year, “Because I wanted to drop out. No reason, just that.” Subsequent conversation revealed that he experienced significant corporal punishment when studying and this may have influenced his decision to leave school, as illustrated by the following explanation:

The teachers hit me a lot. I was sometimes forced to kneel on dried jackfruit peelings. And sometimes they hit my hands and my fingers with a thin rattan stick. They hit me when I was late. They hit me when I did not give a correct answer. Also, a teacher punished me because one time I was playing [rubber-

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17 The Khmer word *kechel*, translated “lazy” in English does not necessarily mean lacking in motivation to do something as the English word connotes. It can also mean that a person does not have sufficient physical energy to complete a task, that one is bored and does not want to participate, that there are factors one is embarrassed to divulge what is preventing one’s participation, etc. *Kechel* is used as a general excuse for absenting oneself from something.
band jump rope] with the girls and the teacher told me not to do that. I like that game so I did not stop. So the teacher hit me for that. (I-P25)

A fourth daughter, who earns income by selling fish at a nearby market, lives on the same compound as her mother and three sisters, in a wooden house immediately adjacent to Yei’s home. Her husband, a Grade 5 teacher at Sala Phum, supplements his teaching salary ($60/month and usually not given on time) by fishing in the dry season and doing bicycle repairs and odd jobs in the rainy season. During our stay, he would leave home around 5:00 pm, overnight in a boat on a lake, and return about 6:30 am just in time to shower, quickly eat a breakfast of cold rice and leftover soup, and barely get to school on time for the 7:00 am flag-raising. This couple has two grown children who graduated from Grade 12 at Sala Phum, both of whom were attending university in Phnom Penh during our village sojourn. Their daughter studies electrical engineering at the government’s polytechnic and their son studies economics at a private university.

Yei’s second son lives with his family on the far side of our host village; his daughter (Yei’s granddaughter) attends Sala Phum. One married daughter and her family live in a neighbouring village and they come regularly to visit Yei and discuss agriculture, weather, and family matters. The eight siblings who live within close proximity help one another in their various agricultural pursuits. There is one daughter who lives with her family in Koh Kong province, running a successful noodle and coffee shop.

Village life in brief

A typical day in a lowland Cambodian village begins early. In my host family, Yei was up, out, and squatting downstairs boiling water in a charcoaled blackened kettle by 4 am. She worked around the family’s two cows (stall was adjacent to the kitchen) by the light of a
kerosene candle (a little wick in a soda can). My routine was to rise at 4:45, in order to shower, have coffee, and personal time before the others got up. By 6:00 a.m. everyone was busy doing some chore or other, accompanied by the soft cluck and scurry of chicks and hens that are constantly underfoot. We breakfasted on cold rice and left-over food from the previous night, each in their own time. Every single morning as I left the house to walk to school, the neighbour leaned over the bamboo fence and asked – “Are you walking to school?” before she laughed and shook her head in amusement (or puzzlement?). It took 15-20 minutes to make the journey to school over a rutted dirt road, rice paddies and spiky sugar palm trees stretching out on all sides. The research school was located in an adjacent village to my host village. My RA refused to walk because “it is too hot,” though I suspected the real answer had more to do with status than with the weather.

Living in a village allowed valuable insight into the “hows” of rural schooling, and some of the “whys,” as well as the plain hard work that formal education is in such basic conditions. Living here also gave me a deep appreciation for the resilience, hospitality, storying, patience, and wry, good humour that characterised my host family and people in my host village - characteristics I assume are true of “rural Cambodians” generally. Experiencing first-hand the intensely communal nature of life and livelihood provided renewed respect for the fundamentally relational nature of human interaction in Cambodia, and a more profound understanding of the function/s of traditional social organisation. For excerpts from field notes about village life see Box 7 below.
Box 7: Excerpts from field notes about village life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VILLAGE LIFE – EXCERPTS FROM FIELDNOTES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Home, sweet ...</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As with traditional Khmer village homes, the house is on stilts – beneath are the simple kitchen, rice storage, cows, and place to be with guests. The upstairs living/sleeping area is one large room with a massive wooden bed flush against the far wall and extending into the centre of the room. This bed has no mattress – just a konteil (woven mat) on the slats. It’s cheap, and cooler, to sleep on mats we were told as we had our $53 foam mattress delivered from a neighbouring market town. This main room is sparsely furnished – all furnishings line the edges of the room. Bed mats, thin mattresses, mosquito nets are neatly rolled up along one wall (to the left as you enter). Continuing right there is the bed, then in the far corner stands a massive wooden cupboard on top of which sits an old television (does it work?) and boxes. Then a doorway, and next a large wooden table that has a thick plastic laminate stapled to the top and a long line of candles and jars with incense and a couple of black and white photos of the deceased father and grandparents sitting in puddles of melted wax. Then the doorway to the family’s storage room. Against the next corner another small wooden chest atop which are a few instant noodle boxes that seem to contain the entirety of the clothes and possessions of the brother who works in the fields. Then two big cardboard boxes on top of each other... few possessions for four adults.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meet the neighbours</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our first full day in the village. It is a little green, treed oasis in a large expanse of dry and dusty rice paddies. A giggling group of children led us around the village (it takes 15 minutes to walk around the entire place if you don’t stop). We stopped in at three homes when asked by women working there to “come and sit.” Each time we were invited, we did “sit and rest” (angkoi layng). In each instance the kids accompanying us fell away to amuse themselves while RA1 and I settled in to talk with the adults. Each time we were invited to drink and eat something. Each time, as we rose to leave, the children would suddenly materialise in a phalanx around us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is difficult at this early stage to be making connections between people – who is related in what way to whom? There are lots of kamooey (niece/nephew) and bong paon (relatives) among people in this village. For instance, one of the grandmothers we spoke with is the mother-in-law of the sister next door. I am sure the relational tangle will soon be sorted, but for now it is disorienting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>An object (subject?) of curiosity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Already in these first days information about me is passed around the village like fire in a forest. All kinds of little details, never mind the big ones! Like: she drinks coffee with no sugar every the morning! And, of course, if they talk about EVERYTHING then this means they are watching EVERYTHING! Being a constant subject of attention and conversation makes me very tired. Perhaps this is what people in the village feel like, in regard to my persistent questions and presence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>It’s all a matter of ... perspective?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many of the questions people in our village ask me relate to lifestyle and occupation – how much do things cost (e.g. to rent a house, to buy a kg. of chicken, to go to school); do they grow rice in my country?; are there many cars there?). A favourite question seems to be “do you have chickens like this in your country?” I say yes – but no, we do not keep chickens in our houses. We keep them in very large sheds, by the thousands actually, and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
we get the meat and eggs at an impersonal store.

As I attempt to give honest answers, I am struck by how difficult it is to “summarise” a nation as vast as Canada into a simple answer. For all questions it would seem that a big part of the answer is: “that depends” (on where one is located in Canada, if one is rural/urban, etc.). It is also important, I feel, for people here to know that things are relative and that it is very difficult to compare simple facts between two countries. For example, we pay income and other tax in Canada but the concept of taxation is foreign to rural Cambodians so talking about prices seems complicated.

So then, I am struck also by how much I am trying to cram “Khmer reality” into small boxes – this effort to understand the other can be a very colonising enterprise even when one knows better! Even as I resist giving simplified answers for Canada, I see myself demanding simplified, unified answers for the complexities of Cambodia. I have to resist trying to homogenise these people I am living among and studying; and also to resist being homogenised myself!

Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the philosophical basis and practical working out of an 18-month phased inquiry about local negotiation of Child Friendly Schools in one community in rural Cambodia. Three distinct methodological traditions (critical, feminist, postcolonial) were merged in this critical ethnographic study which facilitated collaborative and extended interaction with respondents in their own life arena. The influence of these theories is evident in the framing of the original research question, the choice of site and respondents, the tools used for generating and collecting data, and interpretation of the findings.

Questions were posed to frequently overlooked populations, specifically administrators and teachers at village-level. As well, a concerted effort was made to interact with female teachers, and women and girls at the research site. This methodology enabled a close look at the mechanics of coercion which impact village-level education against the backdrop of regional environment and domestic local socio-cultural environment, and globalised education-for-development discourse. Implicated as oppressive forces are the historic trends, intensely hierarchical and centralised MoEYS system, and the frequently heavy-handed, top-down, time-strapped approach of the international donor community that largely sets Cambodia’s
education agenda. This research explored the discursive infrastructure of education in the form of policy document analysis, as well as observing the daily enactment of the educational enterprise.

Though clearly an aim of this research project, action toward change was not yet apparent when the inquiry process ended. Certainly, discussion with teachers provoked more analytical and self-reflexive analysis than they are accustomed to, and as part of this research, administrators and teachers questioned many aspects of the previously taken-for-granted education system. In addition, several expatriate educators indicated that they were deeply challenged by my questioning of the appropriateness of Western educational orthodoxies for Cambodia. Some of the major findings of this research were disseminated through teaching courses to M.Ed. students at RUPP. Additionally, research findings will be disseminated through the EDUCAM network, placed in the Education Resource Center at RUPP, and circulated among major donors in the form of a locally printed summary document.
CHAPTER FOUR: CAMBODIAN EDUCATION IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The imprimatur of Cambodian history, culture, and politics is sharply etched on the nation’s educational practice. After briefly outlining the country context in terms of politics, economics, demographics, and human development, this chapter then describes historical influences on education as nine distinct periods. Next, the chapter provides an overview of contemporary educational issues and directions, including foreign aid, the quality imperative, and regional influences. One section pertains specifically to girls’ access to education demonstrating that despite progress toward global goals of equity and empowerment, formal education still heavily favours boys. This chapter ends by providing a picture of the current educational landscape including a statistical status summary, and identifying eight serious challenges confronting the Cambodian educational system today.

Country Context: The Bigger Picture

The past two decades of relative peace and political stability in Cambodia have provided a foundation for many changes and improvements in quality of life. However, it is difficult to provide a singular description of contemporary Cambodia. Against many macro indicators the country is flourishing. For instance, since 1998, infant and maternal mortality have decreased, the number of children in school has increased and the number of girls enrolled in primary school is very nearly equal to the number of boys at the same level, the rate of HIV/AIDS infection has diminished and by 2010 around 90 percent of people infected had access to anti-retroviral drugs (RGC, 2011b; World Bank, 2012a). About two million poor Cambodians are now covered by health equity fund schemes (a government and donor-subsidised form of basic health insurance). What is more, the World Bank reported that the
nation’s economy grew about ten percent annually from 1998-2008 (2012). Since the global economic downturn in 2008-2009, the country staged a strong recovery, with GDP growth of 6 percent in 2010 and 2011 and this momentum shows signs of continuation. Poverty has been reduced from 47 percent in 1993 to about 30 percent in 2007.

However, economic indicators, and especially in aggregate, do not tell the whole story and can be misleading. For instance, one reason that national poverty levels have decreased is simply because the definition has changed: the cut-off point for the poverty line was reduced from $1/day to $0.61/day. Cambodia’s score on the UN’s HDI still hovers in the lowest quintile (139/187). Despite impressive economic growth figures, in reality the gap between rich and poor increased: 92 percent of the total poor live in rural areas and the rural poor are not much better off than a decade ago. Poverty in rural areas stands at 39 percent, while in Phnom Penh it is just five percent and 25 percent in other urban locations (Pou, 2010). In fact:

Inequality levels have risen dramatically. The Gini Coefficient (which measures inequality – zero being perfect equality and 1 being absolute inequality) has moved upwards from 0.35 in 1994 to 0.40 in 2004 and 0.43 in 2007. As a recent trend, inequality has increased not only between rural and urban areas, but also within rural areas. Rural inequality rose from 0.27 in 1994 to 0.33 in 2004 and climbed again to 0.36 in 2007. (World Bank, 2009 cited in UNDP, 2010b)

Furthermore, food security remains a critical problem in Cambodia. Twelve percent of households, or 1.7 million individuals, are food insecure annually and most of these households are affected by even slight increases in food prices. Cambodia is among the 36 countries in the world with the highest burden of child under-nutrition and one of the 33 "alarming" countries for levels of hunger and under nutrition (UNDP, 2010b).
Human rights and vulnerability

Relative national-level peace belies a violent daily reality for many Cambodians. While the nation is technically a liberal democracy, the political scene is characterised by human rights violations, widespread corruption, pervasive nepotism, and egregious environmental destruction more than by a vibrant civil society and political participation (Brinkley, 2011; Global Witness, 2007; LICADHO, 2011). The government largely ignores social contract it has theoretically made with its citizens in return for its governing authority— that is, an agreement to provide law and order, essential welfare for particularly marginalized groups, a transparent political system, and basic social services such as healthcare and basic education. What is more, Cambodia has a very young population – in 2009 nearly one-third (32 percent) of the population was below 15 years of age, a slight decrease from 2004 when this figure was 36 percent (RGC/NIS, 2010b, p. 53). More Cambodians now than at any other time in the nation’s history are more educated. But for the majority of the nation’s citizens underemployment and unemployment as well as political disenfranchisement, are very real sources of frustration and poverty.

Domestic violence continues to affect at least half of all Cambodian women\(^{18}\) and a significant proportion of children regardless of socio-economic status (Miles, 2008). And intra-household violence has become increasingly vicious, even deadly (ADHOC, 2011; Amnesty International, 2010; Farley, Freed, Phal & Golding, 2012; LICADHO, 2007). Domestic violence has significant effects for all areas of life, including children’s education.

\(^{18}\) In a recent national survey (MoWA, 2009) 22.5 percent of female respondents said they had personally experienced violence at the hands of their husbands, and about 64 percent of the sample knew a husband who acted violently toward his wife (p. 17). And among poor respondents, 42 percent personally knew someone (a female) who had been raped (p. 18). More than 50% of all respondents felt that a wife behaving in an argumentative, disrespectful, or disobedient manner warranted a violent response by her husband, even of the life-threatening type. This last figure is down from about 75 percent in 2005.
Children are likely to miss school on account of their own physical or psychological injury, or when a primary caregiver is abused, like a mother, and these injuries affect capacity to care for children in the family. Even if attendance is not disrupted, a child’s ability to concentrate and to learn can be negatively affected.

One of the most visible human rights violations in Cambodia is commercial sexual exploitation, including human trafficking and child prostitution. Cambodia is considered a source, transit, and destination country for victims of human trafficking and trafficking affects every province in Cambodia. Its TIP (Trafficking in Persons) rating since 2007 has moved between Tier 2 and Tier 2 Watch List, which essentially designates Cambodia as a country where trafficking occurs (US Department of State, 2012). It is notoriously difficult to obtain reliable figures of trafficking victims, or indeed, for any form of sexual exploitation not least because of ethical and methodological difficulties, confusion about terminology and technical definitions, as well as the fact that often authorities have a vested interest in maintaining the systems of exploitation (Brown, 2007; Derk, Henke & Ly, 2006; ECPAT, 2011; Song, nd; Steinfatt & Baker, 2010). Steinfatt & Baker (2010) report that “Since the mid to late 1990s it has been common to read that there are in the range of 80,000 to 100,000 trafficked women and another 5,000 to 15,000 children sexually trafficked in Cambodia” (p. 51)

At one end of the spectrum, MSNBC reported that one-third of an estimated 800,000 prostitutes in Cambodia are children (Hansen, 2004 cited in Song, p. 1 – the source of

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19 Just under a fifth of those who experienced violence by a spouse reported that their children missed school 5-20 times in the last 12 months. Seven percent of women who experienced violence by a spouse said their children missed school 20 times or more during that same period because of violence in the family.
20 People who are trafficked are most commonly sold for sex or forced labour – and often experience both. In Cambodia, a large number of children are trafficked domestically; some, though less are trafficked internationally.
21 According to the US-DS’s definition, there are four tiers. Tier 1 and Tier 3 respectively designated complete compliance and non-compliance the Trafficking Victims Protection Act’s (TVPA) minimum standards. **TIER 2**: Countries whose governments do not fully comply with the TVPA standards, but are making significant efforts at compliance. **TIER 2 WATCH LIST**: Partial compliance AND significant numbers of victims of severe forms of trafficking as well as limited evidence of movement toward compliance.
MSNBC’s figures is not stated); and a more recent (and statistically rigorous) study (Steinfatt & Baker, 2010) gives a yearly estimate of 37,140 persons who worked as a sex worker at any time during the year (p. 61) and a figure of less than 1,000 women and children (combined) trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation (p. 63). And somewhere in the middle of the estimate spectrum, research in 2007 on sexual exploitation of children in tourism reported that the number of individuals in prostitution in Cambodia ranges from 40,000 to 100,000 (30-35 percent of which UNICEF estimates are children) (Johns Hopkins University, cited in ECPAT, 2011, p. 9).

Other particularly vulnerable child groups include street children (there are an estimated 24,000 street children in Cambodia) (ECPAT, 2011, p. 9); and children engaged in the worst forms of child labour. The ILO reports that over 313,000 children are trapped in the worst forms of exploitation such as drug trafficking and prostitution (cited in ECPAT, 2011, p. 9). There are numerous multilateral and non-governmental agency programmes designed to promote child rights and child protection and prevent exploitation of children; but the numbers of Cambodian children so-affected remains in the tens of thousands. In summary, social, cultural, economic, and technological influences converge to make Cambodia an easy place for predators to prowl and a difficult place for children to live. As the recent ECPAT report (2011) notes, reasons for child vulnerability are inherent in cultural and sociological factors.

It has been observed that Cambodian children are indeed expected to abide by rules set forth by adults, and saying “no” to an adult is not easily tolerated. Combined with a historical legacy of foreign imperialism and the societal hierarchy such a system had facilitated, this makes children particularly vulnerable to adult predators… (ECPAT, 2011, p. 9).

Vulnerability also has a distinct gendered dimension, as Brown (2007) explains in her study about women involved in Cambodia’s commercial sex industry:
In conclusion, trafficking and related practices within Cambodia were found to rely upon and exploit gender-based norms that blame and stigmatise women and girls for involvement in the commercial sexual exploitation industry, regardless of the patterns of force and violence that have led to their presence there. This strongly suggests that counter-trafficking efforts need to address patterns of social vulnerability and wider norms that support not only the trafficking of women and girls, but also sexual violence and exploitation, to be effective. (p. 10)

Certainly, the majority of children growing up in Cambodia today cannot assume that they will be able to meet their own basic needs, or have access to basic social services such as education to which they are legally entitled. As in many LICs, for Cambodian children, there are multiple risk factors and variables (such as human trafficking and sexual exploitation) that influence a child’s ability to enter school, remain there, attend regularly, and learn the content she or he should. Simple survival remains for many a greater priority than formal education.

This mosaic then – a contrasting image of positive economic growth and increasing severity and frequency of violence, increasing affluence and increasing malnutrition, declining maternal mortality rates and rocketing under-employment, exploitation and affluence, is the context within which formal education occurs. This context directly impacts the capacity and desire of people to participate in formal education; their ability to learn; and the desires, demands, and hopes placed on the education system.

**Education in Historical Context**

Cambodian history is commonly recounted in terms of distinct epochs (Ayers, 2003). In each period, “education” has been explicitly tasked with achieving particular ideological aims (that is: for particular political, social, economic, and/or religious ends) (Chandler, 2008; Clayton, 1995, 1998, 1999, 2002, 2005; Mysliwiec, 2004; Slocomb, 2006). The influence of varied political perspectives on the educational system is visible in several forms:
accessibility, curricula content and scheduling, characteristics of the ideal person the system intends to produce, language/s of instruction, and administrative and planning processes. While processes, plans, and textbooks are slowly being streamlined, vestiges of previous regimes remain— not least, teachers trained under different eras (and languages), or not trained (Duggan, 1996; VSO & NEP, 2008). For example, the MoEYS Non-formal Education Department still uses literacy materials developed in the refugee camps in Thailand which were designed to facilitate repatriation and resettlement (Rosenblom, 2004). Higher education remains a free-for-all with at last count, more than 60 providers and a stalled accreditation system (Ford, 2006; McNamara, personal communication). Furthermore, rhetoric and politics notwithstanding, pedagogical practices appear to have changed little, regardless of the regime (Duggan, 1996).

After independence from France in 1953, subsequent regimes presented with a “strong man”, a new name for the nation, a constitution, different benefactors, as well as unique programmes for “development” and change (Slocomb, 2006). In the past six decades, Cambodia has been subjected to an extreme array of political influences under six official forms of government (monarchy, socialist, Republic, two radically divergent versions of Communism, and currently a (theoretical) liberal democracy. During this period, the country has also had five different official languages (Khmer, French, Vietnamese, Russian, and English) (Clayton, 1999; Fergusson & Le Masson, 1997). Each period has influenced the nature of the country’s educational system.

Pre-colonial era

During what is called the “pre-colonial period” (an era that in fact spans 1800 of Cambodia’s 2000 year history, and includes numerous political, military, religious, and socio-
cultural conflagrations) mass/popular education in Cambodia took two main forms: consistent use of traditional recitations for society-at-large and *wat*-based classes for boys. In both cases, the primary purpose of general education seems to have been inculcation of strict behavioural norms in support of the social status-quo and development of a particular religiously prescribed morality. Little is known about education for the elite classes, which must have occurred prior to a more public education effort, given the amount and nature of historic Khmer and Sanskrit writings (Chandler, 1996).

Starting with the introduction of Theravada Buddhism (~500 AD), boys were formally educated by monks in *wats*, or Buddhist temples. Females were excluded from this form of education on the basis of religious rationale. Though the system was not standardised, it is generally understood that participants received instruction in literacy, numeracy, vocational skills, and Buddhist precepts for a two to three year period (Ayers, 2003; Fergusson & Le Masson, 1997; Mabbett & Chandler, 1995). Emphasis was on memorisation and recitation of Buddhist texts – it is questionable how many boys actually learned to read (Clayton, 1995; Martin, 1994). Parents and communities contributed to the construction and maintenance of the temples in return for participation. Some elements of this system are still visible in contemporary Cambodia. For instance, school teachers are still accorded the respect/high social status traditionally reserved for monks; classroom activity rely heavily on memorisation and recitation. And, parents and communities maintain a strong belief that one of the main purposes of formal education is to provide discipline, and produce moral character (Reyes, 2009; Rodier, 1999; Smith-Heffner, 1993). It is also notable that a strong and distinct moral component permeates Government policy language. For instance, the Cambodian Prime Minister H.E. Hun Sen’s address to the National Assembly in promotion of the nation’s
premier socio-economic development document, the Rectangular Strategy Phase II, exhorted Cabinet members thus:

> There is no goal more sacred then improving the lives of our people and no other task more rewarding. It is not for our rhetoric but for our record of good and progressive work that we will be remembered. Good, selfless work in the cause of upliftment of our people is its own reward and will surely earn merits of our lives. Therefore, I once again urge you to take up the tasks ahead of us with utmost earnestness, sincerity, devotion, and to the best of your ability (Hun Sen, 2008, para. 114).

And the subsequent National Strategic Development Plan Update 2009-2013 declares the aim (and achievement) of the national EFA plan to be education that assists all Cambodian children “…to become good students, good children, and good citizens…” (RGC, 2010a, p. 61).

The dominant means of public education was rather informal and purely oral, though no less prescribed, and equally vigorous in its aim to instil common notions of “proper behaviour” in society generally, but with the bulk of emphasis on female propriety (Ayers, 2003; Chandler, 2008; Mabbett & Chandler, 1995). Examples of this type of education include songs, didactic poetry, the *gatiloke* (folk tales preoccupied with “right living”), and the *chhap srey* (female law) / *chhap pro* (male law). These poems, tales, and instructions were regularly employed during religious events, community celebrations, and major rites of passage (weddings, birthdays, funerals). Proverbs, aphorisms, and maxims comprised another, less informal but no less influential, way to preserve and transmit cultural beliefs and heritage. Elements of this informal system continue to figure largely in contemporary Khmer society – the *chhap* is still part of the official elementary school curriculum and everyday conversation abounds with proverbs and moral tales. And as traditional art forms are being revitalised, so too is interest and modernised representation of the ancient stories of Khmer mythology.
The French formally assumed control over Cambodia in 1863. Though the French colonial administration began addressing mass education in the Kingdom almost immediately upon resuming power. As there was a very low base to start from, France’s educational policy in Cambodia is often accused of benign neglect and sometimes of outright discrimination. Statistics from this period do support this view – for instance, not until 1918 did the French promote anything like a permanent educational system through standardisation (Fergusson & Le Masson, 1997, p. 96). Just six Cambodians had graduated from high school by 1930 (Chandler, 2008) and these had studied in Vietnam, because full secondary education was not available in Cambodia until 1935 (Ayers, 2003). Despite a policy of compulsory attendance, in 1944 only 15-20 percent of boys were enrolled in school. At the time of independence in 1953, the number of Cambodians with exposure to the formal system was still very low: there were reportedly 217,000 children in primary schools, 3,300 enrolled in secondary schools, and just 144 people had received the full baccalaureate (Vickery, 1984, p.18 as cited in Fergusson & Le Masson, 1997, p. 100).

Scholars and others have recently begun to cast the French colonisers more positively, attributing low involvement by the local populace more to wilful Khmer resistance than to French intentions (Clayton, 1995). There were multiple reasons for resistance: the use of French rather than Khmer as the language of instruction was perhaps the most compelling. As well, it is probable that the general population did not consider French education as legitimate or appropriate for Cambodian society, and some in the religious establishment saw French education as endangering Buddhist doctrine. Royal resistance to the French presence in Cambodia ceased with the death of King Norodom in 1904. By 1906, Norodom’s successor
Sisowath “issued the first decree requiring compulsory education that made it obligatory of parents to send their sons, at the age of 8, to a pagoda to learn how to read, write, and count. The Cambodian language was to be taught in all pagodas…” (Fergusson & Le Masson, 1997, p. 95).

Three main types of public schools developed under French occupation (Clayton, 1995). Franco-Khmer schools employed a French curriculum and used the French language exclusively, running from primary to through high-school (ten years). *Khum* (community) schools were an idea copied from neighbouring Thailand. From 1911 onward, these community-based secularised *wat* schools provided three years of education, the first year in Khmer language, which gradually gave way to French. The third and most popular institutions were modernised *wat* schools which offered three grades of Khmer-only instruction, including religious instruction. This type of schooling commenced in 1924, when volunteer monks received teacher training at French demonstration schools.

The French education system was largely urban, emphasised French as a superior language, and focused on a “classical” education to prepare (males) for employment in the colonial civil service (Keng & Clayton, 2007). In effect, it acted as a “sorting machine” that provided basic education from which the most promising children were plucked and put through the Franco-Khmer system (Ayers, 2000). Early on, education became associated with social mobility and as one of the very few means available for personal advancement, as well as security afforded by employment in the civil service. This notion of mobility is still a strong motivator for participation in education today. Secondary education remained the purview of the Cambodian elite. Though large numbers of children reportedly participated in the *wat*-based schools, literacy levels remained low and a “culture of literacy” did not flourish. The
nation’s first Khmer-language newspaper was not published until 1927 (Martin, 1994; Tully, 2002). Influence of the French educational system is still evident in the present-day Cambodian educational system in emphasis on form, authoritarianism, and rigidity (I-A18), of generalised expectation of employment as an outcome, the continued elitism of tertiary education, and a systemic emphasis on humanities.

**Kingdom of Cambodia (1953-1970): King Sihanouk’s Buddhist Socialism**

King Sihanouk’s short reign is sometimes called the “golden age” of Cambodian education because of its very heavy investment in educational infrastructure (read: school buildings), its change of the primary language of instruction from French to Khmer, and its emphasis on building nationalism. Expenditure is reported to have amounted to more than 20 percent of the total national budget in some years (Duggan, 1996; Fergusson & Le Masson, 1997). Not satisfied with the goal of universal primary education pushed by UNESCO, Sihanouk simultaneously strove for compulsory secondary education but without apparent regard for the need for teachers, materials, and budgets.

With significant technical support from France and Russia, Sihanouk also rapidly developed a set of higher education and tertiary education facilities in cities throughout the country. Their influence might be one reason why, under Sihanouk, curriculum in higher education was geared toward industry and commerce, despite almost a complete lack of development of any industrial or commercial sectors (Fergusson & Le Masson, 1997, p. 104). Cambodia’s first university in Cambodia was founded in 1960 (Royal Khmer University /University of Phnom Penh), followed by the establishment of the first provincial university in 1965. By 1970, Cambodia had eight institutions of higher learning offering degrees in 30 different faculties (Duggan, 1997; Fergusson, Bonshek & Le Masson, 1995).
Though ostensibly providing formal education for the purpose of developing a modernised, industrialised nation, Sihanouk essentially expanded access to a French system of education. It tended to favour urban rather than rural areas (both in the quality of education provided, as well as the breadth of courses offered), and to focus on the humanities and preparing graduates for civil service. In addition, failure to develop complementary aspects of modernisation, such as industry and manufacturing, resulted in a large number of restive graduates (Ayers, 2003; Duggan, 1996, 1997; Fergusson & Le Masson, 1997).

By the time King Sihanouk was deposed in a military coup in 1970, a total of 1,160,456 students were enrolled in some type of formal education (schools, colleges, university) in Cambodia compared to just 432,649 in 1956 (Ayers, 2003, p. 62). Total enrolment in higher education increased from 200 in 1953, to about 5,753 in 1970. The nation could boast of 3,202 primary schools, 163 secondary schools, and nine universities – an increase of 130 percent compared to the preceding French era (Ayers, 1999, p. 206). In summary, under Sihanouk the quantity of educational opportunities exploded, but without commensurate regard for qualitative issues or for the nature of that education. The nation remained locked in a subsistence agriculture system, and the French educational priority of arts and humanities continued to dominate higher education. By 1970, just 16 percent of students enrolled in higher education were in the combined faculties of education, engineering and agriculture (Tan Kim Huon, 1974, p. 30, as cited in Fergusson & Le Masson, 1997, p. 101).

**Khmer Republic (1970 - April 1975): Lon Nol period**

In ideological terms, Lon Nol espoused a philosophy of neo-Khmerisation, aiming to mobilise people around the [former] glory of the Angkorian era (Slocomb, 2006). In economic terms, he replaced Sihanouk’s socialist orientation with a firm commitment to capitalism. In
terms of the educational policy agenda, however, there was little change in the rhetoric and
direction of education as a tool for modernisation (Ayers, 2000, p. 450).

Practically speaking, it is unlikely that much formal education occurred during this very
tumultuous period which included a total of nine different governments (Slocomb, 2006), a 3-
year period of steady bombing by the United States military (Shawcross, 1986), more than a
third of public school teachers shifting to (more lucrative) military service (Duggan, 1996), and
massive population movements from rural to urban areas.

Within one year of coming to power, the number of primary schools in government-
controlled areas had fallen from 5,275 to 1,064 (Ayers, 1999, p. 206). Most rural areas (the
majority of the country) were largely controlled by the Khmer Rouge and other rebel forces.
Higher education, including teacher training, effectively ceased to exist (Fergusson, Bonshek
& LeMasson, 1995). There is virtually no information available about schooling in non-
government controlled territory during this period.

**Democratic Kampuchea (17 April 1975 - 7 January 1979): Khmer Rouge**

Though a “discourse of destruction” continues to dominate popular media and scholarly
works, Ayers (1999) and Clayton (1998) contend that this is a simplistic rendering of the
reality of life and education under Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge regime. They argue that this view
holds that regime as a scapegoat for contemporary social ills and underdevelopment.
According to Clayton (1998), while significant destruction clearly occurred (socio-cultural,
material, economic, religious, political) in this period, the KR was not without a vision and
plan for (re)construction. Their 4-year National Plan promoted the larger social aims of self-
reliance, independence, and egalitarianism. To this end, the KR regime stated three goals for
education: to promote basic literacy and numeracy, practical skills rather than theoretical or
academic knowledge, and nationalism/political consciousness. However, because education was sacrificed to other priorities, the KR’s intended results, however minimal, were not realised. Instead, educational delivery was intermittent, the quality of infrastructure was very poor, teachers were ill-equipped and few had formal teaching qualifications (or any experience with school), there were inadequate supplies of materials and students were required to make their own learning instruments, and a significant amount of school time was allocated to singing revolutionary songs and chanting revolutionary slogans (Ayers, 1999, p. 214).

In many ways the Khmer Rouge successfully turned the Cambodian clock back to Year Zero (Ponchaud, 1997). Official documents produced by People’s Republic of Kampuchea (PRK) documents claimed that 75 percent of teachers, 96 percent of higher education students, and 67 percent of primary and secondary students were murdered (Ayers, 1999). Some Western educational historians assert similarly sweeping figures: Clayton (1999) states that between 1975-1979, 90 percent of school buildings were destroyed, and 75 percent of all teachers, professors, and educational administrators were killed. Many of the UN and NGO assessments undertaken within months after the Khmer Rouge were deposed also reported destruction in hyperbolic terms, as “everything was destroyed” or “all school materials were destroyed” (Ayers, 1999, p. 208). Though these figures and assessments are most likely exaggerated (many Cambodians fled to Thailand and elsewhere – see Vickery, 1984), they do reflect the cumulative human cost of war (Ayers, 1999, p. 207). Still, as stated earlier, the “discourse of destruction” is incomplete and unhelpful as it belies (contemporary) issues that may be more accurately attributable to a particular socio-cultural framework than inherent in an extreme political regime.
Clearly then, the influence of the Khmer Rouge regime on education, as on other forms of social organisation, is complex. While the mass murder of Cambodians – including but not limited to or perhaps even targeting - teachers and intellectuals (see Marston, 2002, p. 46), and the paltry efforts which substituted for ‘formal education’ under the KR clearly decimated the system and undermined benefits of educational efforts promoted under previous regimes, it is disingenuous to entirely attribute the current extent of under-development and chronic poor quality to the Khmer Rouge era (Ayers, 1999; Chandler, 2008).

**People’s Republic of Kampuchea (1979 -1989): Heng Samrin regime**

This decade, over which Heng Samrin presided as President, is sometimes called the Vietnamese Decade or referred to as a period of “occupation” (Clayton, 1999). The Heng Samrin government was heavily supported by Communist Vietnam and during this period sounded a clear Marxist-socialist orientation in education, as well as politics and economics. However it is misleading to think of it as a seamless decade of strident socialism; rather, these turbulent years were characterised by famine, insurgency, mass population movements, isolation from the international community, slow reconstruction, and internal party wrangling (Slocomb, 2006). During the UN-declared emergency period (1979-1981) a generous response from the international community was hampered by mutual mistrust and failed negotiation with the suspicious Vietnamese-backed government and conditions imposed by aid agencies.

Still, education was one immediate and on-going priority: within months of the regime change, more than a million children were “on seat” in 5,000 primary schools and by 1981, an estimated 37,000 teachers had received training (Kiernan, 1982, p. 179 as cited in Duggan, 1997). Within four years, the number of operational secondary schools increased from 15 to 213 (Fergusson, Bonshek & Le Masson, 1995, p. 136). By the end of the decade, the basic
education sector had almost returned to pre-Lon Nol levels, though higher education remained poorly developed (Duggan, 1997). Sloper (1999) attributes this to an exclusive donor interest in primary schools and teacher education.

In 1982, the UN abruptly declared the emergency over, and an embargo was declared in an effort to force out the Vietnamese-backed PRK government (Mysliwiec, 2004). While Western aid agencies maintained a strong presence in the refugee camps along the Thai border, few operated inside Cambodia. On account of its Communist status, Cambodia was regarded an international pariah and received assistance exclusively from its historic nemesis-cum-benefactor, Vietnam, and a small number of Eastern Bloc nations (Clayton, 1999).

Internationally, Cambodia was represented by the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) under the leadership of HRH Prince Sihanouk. This government-in-exile, an alliance between the Khmer Rouge and non-Communist resistance forces, was internationally recognised through the 1980s, holding the nation’s seat at the UN General Assembly (Curtis, 1993). In 1985, Pen Sovann’s staunchly socialist Viet Minh faction was deposed and Hun Sen, of decidedly more moderate inclinations, was proclaimed Prime Minister. Though not officially, Hun Sen immediately commenced a programme of “soft” liberalisation and movement toward a market economy.

Clayton (1999) speculates that even more than health, the education sector may have been a priority in this period due to Vietnamese desire to promote a particular agenda, i.e. the erection of “a hegemonic apparatus dedicated to Vietnamese interests” (p. 74). Political education was clearly a priority – all university students, regardless of discipline, were required to pass five courses on Marxist-Leninist theory, world revolutionary theory and the history of the Cambodian revolution, moral education, and Communist economics (Clayton, 1999, p. 73).
There was also curriculum time dedicated to political education for primary and secondary students, but less is known about this. The education system was explicitly designed to produce “new men” who were “willing to fight against imperialism and capitalism” and to advance the communist cause internationally, recognising in particular the connections that underpinned the Cambodia, Vietnamese, and Soviet revolutions” (Clayton, 2005, p. 512).

Political issues aside, and considering the difficulty Cambodia had in securing external financial and technical assistance due to the UN-imposed aid embargo, Cambodia’s collective educational achievements during this decade are impressive. From 1983-1989 a total of 2,650 Cambodian students completed degree programmes in Eastern Block countries (Clayton, 1999, p. 72). And by 1990, “Cambodia’s [own] institutes of higher learning had graduated 977 doctors, dentists, or pharmacists, 2,196 senior secondary teachers, 1,481 foreign language specialists, 474 technical engineers, 400 economists, and 184 agricultural engineers” (Clayton, 1999, p. 73).

The legacy of Vietnam era education appears to reside less in the current Cambodian education system per se, than it does in the political knowledge and linguistic skills of adults educated during that decade. Tellingly, university teachers and MoEYS officials interviewed for my research always contrasted education in the Vietnam period with the Pol Pot era that immediately preceded it, and never with education before Pol Pot or after 1993. A positive view is that the very strong emphasis by the Vietnamese on educational reconstruction provided a sturdy (material and psychological) foundation for subsequent educational reform (see Box 8 below for an example). A more jaundiced view is that students in this era wasted significant time in studying Marxist-Leninism/Communism, and that use of Vietnamese
language, textbooks, and technical advice added yet another thread to an already shredded educational and social tapestry.

**Box 8: A university educator’s reflections on the Vietnamese era**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>A university educator’s reflections on the Vietnamese era</strong></th>
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| About education [during Pol Pot regime] – Pol Pot destroyed EVERYTHING [ah a-ling: completely nothing]! We have nothing, like an ocean [tek sam-ot: metaphor for can’t see land, we only see water; we have no reference point so don’t know where to go or what to do]. So we start from Zero Point. So now I give you the key, you can start the introduction with this – Cambodia at Zero Point. And after that [Pol Pot regime] in 1980 is what we call Khmai roat Kampuchea. In this time, it’s like a lotus flower growing up from the mud [pkah chuk doh cheng pi puak]. It was like growing out from the mud and seeing the new sun, when Vietnam came to our country. At first we are like a baby not yet knowing how to walk; Vietnam helped us to walk. Because for the period of three years, 8 months, 20 days during Pol Pot time we don’t have anything. Vietnam helped us to walk. We started with little steps, step-by-step. After we finished the course and it kept developing, improving. Vietnam helped us a lot and the Cambodian government tried their best to start. Vietnam came to help us and if we didn’t have Vietnam it would be very difficult for us. We don’t know what to do or where to go, like I said we are in the middle of the ocean. We don’t know where to start from. After Vietnam came to help prepare everything, then we have stability. We have schools again, we have curriculum, we have teachers again…Vietnam helped us prepare teachers, curriculum…and then they left. So after that we kept developing [ourselves]. We improved. Even after that, Vietnam always came to help us with workshops and to do training courses for Khmer teachers during vacation. So after we get out from Pol Pot regime, it is new light and we can see new environment; something new, more developed. If we compare [Vietnamese era] to the time before Pol Pot regime, we can’t compare it at all because we have just passed the Zero Point. From 1979 until 1993 we call roat Kampuchea or Heng Samrin time. Starting from Zero Point we develop little by little until 1993. That is that time when we saw more light, saw more of the world. And if we compare from 1993 and now, we see it is better now than in 1993. So this is like going step-by-step. It’s difficult to compare, but we see development happening little by little. But if no one came to help us [in 1979] it would be difficult to achieve development. (I-P44 – Male professor at Royal University of Phnom Penh)


The year 1989 marked a significant turning point for Cambodia on the international stage. As the Vietnamese enacted a unilateral withdrawal, Hun Sen gave the nation a new name, national anthem and flag, and began moving toward an independent political identity, decoupling the nation’s political allegiance from Vietnam (Fergusson, Bonshek & Le Masson,
1995). One step in this direction occurred in 1990 with the official elimination of political education and cancellation of all university courses on Marxism-Leninism; further, the recently erected Political Training College was incorporated as part of the Royal University of Phnom Penh (Clayton, 1999). Also, because of the lack of resources and the minimal attention paid to higher education, Hun Sen opened the system up to private investment (Ford, 2006; Sloper, 1999). In 1990 a Cambodian delegation attended the Education For All summit in Jomtien, Thailand, and subsequently held its own follow-up EFA Workshop in Cambodia to begin mobilising the Ministry in the direction of the EFA goal of universal high-quality primary education. However, not all the changes were peaceful or within the government’s control – in 1991, RUPP students rioted against government corruption, forced French language instruction, and the return of refugees who were regarded as competition for university places and employment (Chandler, 2008; Clayton, 2002; Sloper, 1999).

In the late 1990s, a series of rancorous government meetings finally resulted in a quadrilateral agreement between the main Cambodian political factions: in October 2001, the State of Cambodia (SOC), Khmer Rouge (KR), KPNLF (Khmer People’s New Liberation Front, and the royalist FUNCINPEC (a French acronym: Front Uni National pour un Cambodge Indépendent, Neutre, Pacifique, et Coopératif) signed the Paris Peace Accords (Roberts, 2002). This agreement stipulated the formation of a Supreme National Council (SNC) which, under Prince Sihanouk’s leadership constituted the “unique legitimate body and source of authority in which, throughout the transitional period, the sovereignty, independence and unity of Cambodia are enshrined" (Curtis, 1993; Heder & Ledgerwood, 1996). The Accord also set in motion the UN’s largest operation to date, the United Nations Transitional Authority of Cambodia (UNTAC), a temporary governing authority tasked with restoring
political order, clearing landmines, disarmament, and education and preparation for democratic elections (Curtis, 1993).

The Paris Peace Accord also signalled a landmark change in how the Western international community regarded Cambodia more generally. Overnight, Cambodia was flooded with international (Western) assessment missions for various sectors (Ayers, 2003; Duggan, 1997; Mysliwiec, 2004; Sloper, 1999). By early 1993, more than 30 international agencies were running more than 100 education-specific projects in Cambodia (Duggan, 1996), the situation a harbinger of the current state of educational affairs. Perhaps not surprisingly, aid to all sectors was characterised by significant overlap, poor coordination, lack of communication, and projects operating at cross-purposes (Chapman, 2000; McNamara, 1999a, 1999b; Sommers, 2004).

The result of the 1993 election heavily favoured the FUNCINPEC political party, but because the Cambodian Peoples Party (CPP) also won a large number of seats, Prince Sihanouk proposed formation of the Interim Joint Administration of the Provisional National Government, a coalition under two Prime Ministers and comprised of representatives from both parties. The revised constitution adopted this same year, explicitly states the government’s commitment to education in Chapter VI (Education, Culture, Social Affairs), and particularly in Articles 65-67 (RGC, 1993), as shown below in Table 7.

Despite the euphoria in Western countries at Cambodia’s shedding of communism, in Cambodia this period was characterised by rural violence between a dwindling but vicious resistance and government forces, thousands of people being maimed by landmines, the chaotic repatriation and resettlement of nearly a half million people, rioting at the country’s main university in Phnom Penh, and the wave of foreigners and finances with UNTAC (Heder
& Ledgerwood, 1996; Lizec, 2000; Roberts, 2002). Given all of the political disruption and uncertainty which occurred during this transition period, it is difficult to imagine how the formal education system functioned. Indeed, the National Education Seminar (MoEYS, 1994, p. 66) concluded:

that the system as it existed in 1993 lacked flexibility; was still saddled with a shortage of qualified teachers and professors; was severely hampered by budgetary constrains which affected nearly every institution; suffered from a shortage of laboratory equipment and other aids; and offered institutional structures, course, and curricula which had minimal relevance to the country’s rehabilitation and long-term development needs.

Not only was the system itself deficient, but there was some question about the quality of the education received by those who had been through the system. The vast majority of students who had graduated from colleges of universities from 1971-1991 had received at most, about six years of formal education (Duggan, 1994, p. 11 cited in Fergusson, Le Masson, & Bonshek, 1995, p. 140).

Table 7: Cambodian Constitution – showing commitment to education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cambodia Constitution demonstrates commitment to education—Art. 65-67</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ The State shall protect and upgrade citizens’ rights to quality education at all levels and shall take necessary steps for quality education to reach all citizens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ The State shall respect physical education and sports for the welfare of all Khmer citizens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ The State shall establish a comprehensive and standardized education system throughout the country that shall guarantee the principles of educational freedom and equality to ensure that all citizens have equal opportunity to earn a living.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ The State shall adopt an educational program according to the principle of modern pedagogy including technology and foreign languages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ The State shall control public and private schools and classrooms at all levels.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The election of a new government and promulgation of a new constitution in September 1993 laid the foundation of yet another political system, Cambodia’s sixth since independence
four decades earlier and its first attempt at a multi-party liberal democracy under a constitutional monarch. It also enshrined a market economy as the nation’s basic economic system, with guarantee of private property ownership. Essentially, political power was shared between the two dominate parties, FUNCINPEC and CPP, with some influence by the opposition Sam Rainsy Party (SRPa). The main political parties negotiated allocation of Commissions (legislative branch) and Line Ministries (executive branch) based on party affiliation. Under the dual government arrangement, the CPP retained control of “right-hand” ministries (such as Finance, Interior, Defence) while allowing FUNCINPEC to run “left-hand” ministries (including Education, Health). In fact, FUNCINPEC ran the MoEYS from 1992 until the appointment of CPP member H.E. Im Sethy in 2007 (McNamara, personal communication, 2010).

Politically and militarily, this era was troubled, though no longer dominated, by the Khmer Rouge which did not officially cease to exist until December, 1999 (Slocomb, 2006). Perhaps what most dominated the country was international aid, as Western donors swarmed back. From the donors’ side, assistance (for education included) was characterised by confusion, lack of communication, contradictory priorities, and uncoordinated engagement by donors (multilateral, bilateral, and non-governmental) (Duggan, 1997). And Cambodia, the “recipient,” has been described as contributing chaos, low capacity, corruption, confusion (between and among departments and ministries), and poor planning (Chapman, 2000; Sommers, 2004).

From 1993 until the present, a dominant policy driver for the education ministry appears to be patronage and employment rather than educational professionalism per se, any particular animosity between parties, or particular policy perspective. MoEYS is the country’s
single largest Ministry in terms of staff numbers, retaining about half of the nation’s entire civil service, and many of them are in non-teaching positions (World Bank, 2005a). Though the number of departments has been rationalised somewhat, and education functions now brought largely under the MoEYS from across various ministries, the education ministry is still comprised of a multiplicity of Secretaries and Under-Secretaries (with attendant administrative support) and a labyrinthine network of sub-offices and project offices (McNamara, personal communication, 2010). It is also the recipient of a dizzying array of donor priorities and accountability mechanisms.

Entry into a new millennium does not appear to have changed the Ministry of Education’s *modus operandi*, nor brought much clarity to the confusing mix of actors on Cambodia’s educational stage as a brief description of “life skills” in the curriculum serves to illustrate. Life skills, defined by MoEYS as “the intellectual, personal, interpersonal and vocational skills that enable informed decision-making, effective communication, and coping and self-management skills that contribute to a healthy and productive life” (cited in NEP, 2012, p. 4) originally fell under the Pedagogical Research Department (PRD) which recently became the Department of Curriculum Development (DCD). The Curriculum Development Policy 2005-2009, devised by several donors collaborating with Ministry officials, defined and clarified delivery of life skills education, distinguishing it from the new concept of “local life-skills” (LLS). The aim of LLS is to “equip students with specialized local Life Skills, including where appropriate, local vocational training” (MoEYS, Curriculum Development Policy (CDP) 2005-2009, as cited in NEP, 2012, p. 4).

Next the DCD produced the 2006 Policy on Life Skills based on the 2001 PRD Policy. It further differentiated between LS as “general” and foundational, and LLS as “specific” and
“practical” as well as detailing strategies, methodologies, and guidance for implementation in formal and non-formal context in the form of 20 LSS modules (NEP, 2012). The CFS standards and guidelines manuals distributed to almost all schools across the country, were produced by another set of consultants and MoEYS departments, and thus different terminology is employed. These manuals (MoEYS, 2008c, p. 11) distinguish between “general life skills” (described as “knowing how to clean up properly; how to use a toilet; about traffic safety, drinking clean water, and how to prevent diseases; how to make calculations when buying and selling” and “basic vocational skills” described as …knowing how to grow vegetables; how to use experimental farm and how to plant flower seedlings; how to do handicraft work, weaving, sewing, cooking, repairing motorcycles, bicycles and radios; being involved in performing arts, raising animals, planting herbal plants; how to operate a computer; how to speak a foreign language; how to carve a model….

The subsequent DCD Policy 2010-2014, developed by international consultants and MoEYS staff, has been in draft form for more than a year, awaiting approval and signature from the Education Minister. What is more, it appears that the primary responsibility for life skills was officially shifted from DCD to the Vocational Orientation Department (VOD) which was created by the Minister in 2009 (I-A21; NEP, 2012).

Into this confusing mix, must be added the work of NGOs and multilateral organisations. The local/international NGO partnership of KAPE/World Education is in the process of finalising a 30-module life skills programme for government schools. Numerous other NGOs have developed and run in-house life skills efforts, some with their own clientele and others in conjunction with local schools. Also recently the Asian Development Bank’s Enhancing Education Quality Project (EEQP) had two national consultants developing an LS curriculum for the public system; however after months of work, they had produced nothing
more than “200 titles with short descriptors and no syllabus – lots of effort with little to show for it” (I-A21). Another ADP-funded project, Education Sector Development Program III (2012?) includes a small component on “Employability Skills” (ES), and reportedly the Minister prefers the notion of ES to LS, considering LS “too soft to address the need for labour market skills” (I-A21). And despite all this policy-level effort, “most schools don’t even conduct LS classes as there has been no formal orientation for teachers and there are few resources, if any, available for doing it. The onus tends to be on the school and community to come up with classes and resources” (I-A21).

**Refugees (1975-1999): Reluctance and repatriation**

One piece frequently missing from accounts of Cambodian education history is an account of life and education efforts amongst Khmer in the refugee camps (Ferguson, Bonshek & Le Masson, 1995). As upward of 600,000 Khmer lived in the camps for at least some period of time, and the camps flourished for nearly 30 years (United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) repatriation of Cambodian refugees was not completed, nor Cambodian camps closed, until March, 1999). This represents a gross oversight.

Khmer refugees began crossing into Thailand in 1975 with the KR’s take-over; their number swelled in late 1978-1979 when the Vietnamese-backed PRK government assumed control of Cambodia amidst a situation of famine. Among the refugees, and sometimes at their helm as they crossed over, were Khmer Rouge soldiers and leaders, finding safety among the civilian population. As it was impossible to distinguish soldiers from civilians, the KR’s reign of terror continued in some camps.

Gyallay-Pap’s (1989) account of education presents a messy picture of conflicting priorities, programmes, and practices. For years the Thai government prohibited formal
education, fearing that any activity beyond provision of immediate survival needs would make the camps more desirable and permanent, and thereby attract more refugees. Furthermore, because different camps were run by varied Khmer political factions, education was inconsistently implemented across and even within camps. Education efforts in Khmer camps were somewhat formalised in 1988 when the United Nations Border Relief Operation (UNBRO) initiated a 2-year elementary education scheme (Fergusson, Bonshek & Le Masson, 1995, p. 138). Standardisation remained a problem for the duration. Overall, it appears that there were two levels of educational intervention offered to refugees in the camp context: basic education for children, and in-service training for adults who had at least elementary education in professional skills such as mid-wifery, teaching, business, nursing, and medicine (skills required in the camps) (Gyallay-Pap, 1989).

Of tremendous significance for Cambodia, subsequently, was the shift from French to English as a primary language of instruction and reference in the camps – most of the humanitarian agencies, and more than 90 percent of the aid, came from Anglophone nations (Gyallay-Pap, 1989). Secondly, there remained issues of conflict around “certification” and “equivalence” for Cambodians trained in the camps and those later educated in Cambodia, issues that directly affected employment.

**Au Courant: Issues and Direction for Education, 1998-2012**

The history of education in Cambodia has been fairly well documented up until about the past decade. Since David Ayers’ *Anatomy of a Crisis: Development and the state in Cambodia 1953-1998* was published in 2000, other contributions to formal academic knowledge about the education system have been rather ad hoc and diverse, and separated according to educational levels (primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, and different
forms of higher education) . This section, then, aims to fill that gap by outlining how the global agenda for education promoted by the international community has become Cambodia’s reform agenda and directly influenced its education planning structure. This is followed by discussion of the dynamic relationship between donor agencies and the RGC, an important addition to this conversation given Cambodia’s strong dependence on foreign aid. Next the often neglected issue of regional influence is briefly mentioned. Then the section identifies seven major issues directly related to education as it occurs now, some as causes, some as effects, some as unanticipated outcomes.

**The global agenda as Cambodia’s reform agenda**

The long list of educational reforms enthusiastically taken up by MoEYS since 1998 at the behest of the global aid community, as detailed in the Introduction, has some core themes. The main driver is development of human capital within a neoliberal frame that nonetheless retains vestiges of BNA discourse and human rights rhetoric (see Appendix 6 and Appendix 7 for details on particular policy moves over time). Those major sub-themes are student-centred pedagogy, child rights, inclusiveness (by turns: poor, girls, indigenous ethnic minorities, physically disabled), gender, decentralisation/deconcentration, community participation, and promotion of ICT (Tan, 2010). Life skills and vocational training are also recent additions.

Generally, formal education is touted by the Royal Government of Cambodia as a national priority. Tucked under the broader aim of “Capacity Building and Human Resource Development,” education is considered a key component of the Cambodian government’s vaunted *Rectangular Strategy for Growth, Employment, Equity, and Efficiency* (RGC, 2004). That strategy (2004, p. 20) summarises:
The Royal Government has set out a comprehensive strategy on education, as expressed in detail in the Education Sector Support Program for 2001-2005. The strategy aims to enhance capacity of human resources with high technical and scientific skills that effectively respond to labor market needs in terms of entrepreneurship, high creativity, responsibility, discipline, morality, virtue, professional ethics, and honesty in an effort to promote development. (Rectangle IV, Side 1- emphasis mine)

The Rectangular Strategy is now in its second phase (2008) which has changed little from the original document. RGC’s vision is clearly laid out regarding the type of “new men” it wants to produce: a “technologically literate, productive and critically thinking workforce for the country” (MOEYS, 2005b, p. 4). Indeed, human capital discourse dominates RGC policy in all sectors, not only education (Clayton, 2005; Tan, 2007). Formal education is cast as a means for the national goal of integration into the regional as well as global economy (Duggan, 1997, p. 3; MOEYS, 2010; Tan, 2010; Vitikainen, 2001, p. 30). This is unmistakably clear, as an example, in the third main goal of the MOEYS 2004 ICT policy: “Availability of workforce with the ICT skills needed for employment and use in a knowledge-based society, to ensure that Cambodia can compete and cooperate in an increasingly interconnected world.” (p. 4, emphasis mine). Readers with a jaundiced perspective might also read that policy document’s second goal as another example of neoliberal emphasis on “off-loading” government responsibility/expenditure onto the public (or private sector…): “Improved quality of basic education and promote independent and lifelong learning, especially for post-primary education” (p. 4 emphasis mine).

The national budget for the education sector has been rising slowly but steadily; however, in actual expenditure terms, it is still far short of the 15 percent goal (15 percent of total expenditure) the government set for itself (Benveniste, Marshall & Araujo, 2008; McNamara, 1999b), and is not even keeping pace with inflation. As noted recently:
The budget for education increased from 18.3% to 19.2% of total expenditure (2003-2007). However, even though the amount of money allocated to education is rising, education financing as a percentage of GDP is decreasing—the projection for 2009 is just 17% of GDP. It should be noted that the MoEYS has difficulties in accessing its full budgeted amount from the Ministry of Economy and Finance due to reasons related to its absorbing capacity and procedural issues. (UNESCO, 2010a, p. 20-21)

Furthermore, there is lack of clarity as to MoEYS’s recurrent budget share in recent years, that is, non-donor funds actually spent by the MoEYS not simply funds allocated in national budgeting exercises, though every indication that this amount is steadily declining, and worse—that execution is consistently less than allocation (European Commission, 2012).

**Focusing on quality**

The year 2000 was a watershed for contemporary Cambodian education, as focus shifted to more explicitly include quality (Kitamura, 2008), moved from nearly exclusive supply-side emphasis to include demand-side interventions, and donors and MoEYS began to (require and to act upon) interventions to improve accountability (Bunlay et al., 2010; Tan, 2007). Significant efforts by donors to increase efficiency through coordination were also initiated around this time (McNamara, 1999a). For multilaterals, coordination primarily takes the form of the World Bank’s “Sector-wide approach” (SWAP), a model for coordinated funding of the government’s plans that has resulted in support for (and influence on) different levels being divided up by donor (WB focuses on primary education, ADB on the upper-secondary level, and so forth) (Hirosato & Kitamura, 2009). For non-governmental organisations in Cambodia, an organisation called NGO-Education Partnership (NEP) acts as a coordinating body, information clearinghouse, and quality-improvement facilitator.

The government’s development rhetoric is clearly lockstep with the global discourse on economic liberalisation and political democratisation (Clayton, 2005; Tan, 2007; Turner,
2002), a phenomenon that Clayton (2005) attributes equally to indigenous momentum and pressure from Western (donor) nations. However, few reforms in the past two decades actually seem to have a particularly “Cambodian” flavour; rather, they can be traced to larger influence of educational multilateralism (Chapman, 2000; Hirosato & Kitamura, 2009; Sommers, 2004) promoted in Cambodia’s case, by an army of international consultants. McNamara’s (1999b) reflections on this situation remain relevant a decade after they were written:

The Cambodian education system has a better than average collection of development, investment program, master and project plans, almost exclusively initiated and written by the unusually large number of committee and professional experts generously provided by a wide range of diverse donors…. planning in Cambodia is essentially donor driven despite considerable effort by donor experts to engage national participation at all levels…. (1999b, p. 105)

In Cambodia, as in numerous other low-income countries, many changes are a direct result of the internationally prescribed EFA agenda (increasing female participation, national achievement testing, etc.) to which Cambodia subscribed in 1990 and (re)endorsed in 2000 via the Dakar EFA Framework for Action initiative and subsequently in various policy and planning documents (MoEYS, 2002, 2004a, 2007, 2010). Efforts to improve quality have taken the rhetorical form of “child-centred learning” and “active-learning”, two concepts which have become embedded in the recent education policy of Child Friendly Schools (Bunlay et al., 2010; Kitamura, 2008; MoEYS, 2006). Planning and policy development remain top-down and centralised though bearing a clear message of deconcentration, participation, and contextualisation (Pellini, 2007; Sedara & Ojendal, 2007; Tan, 2007; Turner, 2002).

**Cambodia's formal education framework**

The past two decades of Western-influenced national educational planning and policy-making has resulted in a plethora of systems, meetings, and documentation. Apart from detailed policies about specific aspects of the education system (such as education for children
with disabilities, early childhood education, etc.), Cambodia’s general formal education framework is constituted by the following events/documents: Cambodian Constitution (1993), *National Strategic Development Plan: for Growth, Employment, Equity, and Efficiency to Reach Cambodia Millennium Development Goals* (based on the Prime Minister’s Rectangular Strategy Phase 2), National Education Law (2007), and the ESP (Education Strategic Plan)/ESSP (Education Sector Support Program).

Regular mechanisms for accountability include numerous interlinking and sometimes overlapping bodies and events. Some of the mechanisms are: Annual Education Congress, Education Sector Working Group (ESWG), Joint Technical Working Group on Education (JTWG-Ed.), Aid Effectiveness Adviser, Consultative Group (CG), Cambodia Development Cooperation Forum (CDCF), and Global Monitoring Report. Details on each are contained in Annex 9. Listing them is not an attempt to comment on quality of effectiveness as much as to demonstrate the complexities of the playing field of educational funding and policy-making in Cambodia.

**An uneasy alliance: government and donors in the education sector**

For the past decade Cambodia has received around 800 million dollars per year of foreign development assistance, about two-thirds of which is in the form of grants. The figure for 2010 was the highest ever with donor pledges of just under one billion USD. Of this, roughly 30 percent is allocated for health, HIV/AIDS, and education (2009 figures, RGC, 2010b). International NGOs account for about 10 percent of the total amount of foreign financial assistance to Cambodia (in addition to managing some bilateral donor funding), and their focus has traditionally been the social sectors including health and education. Thus, NGOs are an important feature on Cambodia’s educational landscape. The relationship
between the RGC and donors generally has been positive, though the Prime Minister’s widely publicised call during the 2000 CG meeting to move from “donorship to ownership” suggests an attempt to exercise theoretical sovereignty with those who pay the nation’s bills. Since Western aid to Cambodia resumed in the early 1990s, the NGO relationship with the MoEYS has ranged from direct control and coordination to greater degrees of collaboration; and at times, outright hostility. Relational vagaries are poignantly described in Box 9 below, by one long-time educational advisor to Cambodia. His description also underscores the fact that “donors” are by no means a monolith, and that significant differences of philosophy and modality exist among multilateral and bilateral donors, and non-governmental organisations.

**Box 9: NGO reflections on the NGO-MoEYS relationship**

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<tr>
<th>NGO expatriate Education Advisor’s reflections on the NGO-MoEYS relationship as it has evolved over the past two decades</th>
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<td><strong>JKR:</strong> Thinking about the relationship between MoEYS and INGOs and NGOs – would you have a metaphor or way of describing what that relationship is like? There seems to be lots of energy and money around education in Cambodia, but without much effect. I am wondering what ‘failure’ is attributable to whom?</td>
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| **A18 (male expatriate Education Advisor with 10+ years in Cambodia):** Well I mean they are alliances of convenience I guess you could call it. We all have to work together. The quality of the relationships varies. I would say in the 1990s that relationship was very different - because there was a shift in the relationship where NGOs had very much a dominate role, NGOs had most of the money. And the bilaterals and banks were not so involved in the early 90s. When they got involved, giving very large loans – millions of dollars in loans, and a lot of bilateral assistance directly to the government, or if not, then through UNICEF – well, that really changed the equation quite a bit. It kind of disempowered the NGOs. Then I think that there was a sense that – the MoEYS always said just give us the resources and we will do it on our own. We don’t need you.

And I think some key people in the MoEYS did realise that the problems are just so immense that they really need all the help they can get. So I think that in the early 2000s, in the beginning of the decade, things kind of reformed. First the NGOs were the dominant partner. Then there was dis-equilibrium created by the bilaterals and multilateral banks, bringing a lot of resources. Then there was kind of a new equilibrium where I think your NGOs realised they really can’t work without the MoEYS and the Ministry realised it really can’t work without the help of NGOs. So there was kind of a much more positive sense in this alliance of partners with different agenda. |
NGO expatriate Education Advisor’s reflections on the NGO-MoEYS relationship as it has evolved over the past two decades

But I think that toward the end of the decade that seems to be unravelling a bit. I think it’s partly…a sense the government has really not changed a lot and keeps making the same mistakes; and the donors, I guess I don’t know if they realise it – in some cases they might –are too lazy or cowardly to rock the boat…. So I think there is more of a sense of um … expectations began to rise very rapidly at the beginning of the decade, and people thought that there might be some things that would change; and I think that the reality, there has been some progress of course, but the reality has not matched the expectations.

And things don’t really seem to have changed – the substance hasn’t changed. There are certainly a lot more new buildings, a lot more new equipment. There’s a lot more ‘stuff’ in the system, certainly; but in terms of the same structural problems – some are even worse. Like teacher shortages. And these things are not changing. Quality of classroom instruction is extremely poor. I would say there has hardly been any progress in that area since the middle of the decade.

On-going Challenges from the International Aid System

While the tide is slowly turning, there is still considerable input from international consultants into major strategic documents and policy development. One result is that local stakeholders at even the highest levels may not be aware of, nor able to even read, various policy documents which are usually developed first in English, and then partially but seldom completely, translated into Khmer; much less be engaged in meaningful conversation about content. Another way in which the bilateral international aid community [negatively] affects policy implementation is by hiring competent government staff for mega-projects, distracting them from their primary function of government service as these staff then spend all their time on the WB/ADB project which has more stringent accountability standards (and much better remuneration) than government work (I-P109; I-A17).

Further, donor priorities and agenda sometimes compete with each other, and incorporation of specific ideas into the education system thus depend more upon which donor is in ascendance than on what the RGC determines is important.
“Our system now is not connected not linked [like before when we had only French influence]. We take too many different influences from different countries so nothing is consistent. This is not good! Our system changes according to the donor…” (I-P42)

“Changes in the textbooks depend on the external donations by external countries.” (I-P52, male School Director)

The Vice Director of the MoEYS Teaching Training Department (TTD) talked at length about how his department (and MoEYS more generally) does training in specific subjects/areas in collaboration with other NGO’s: he mentioned CFS, child rights, agriculture, environment, health, student-centred learning, mathematics. The specific content, pedagogy, materials, and coverage depend upon the NGO. Often NGOs work by province which can lead to uneven development of aspects of the education system or inconsistencies in what is being taught.

“For some subjects, like Science, VVOB [Belgian NGO] in Kandal cooperates to train our teachers and develop many documents and we incorporated into our science curriculum….Besides that we have JICA [Japanese bilateral donor] also in Science they incorporate some topics; they have already trained trainers in the new lessons and we have incorporated that into Science curriculum.” (I-P40).

Even when donor agenda do not conflict, the sheer volume of different initiatives, concepts, and buzz words can be overwhelming or even oppressive. As one Khmer staff member of an international NGO described it: “Donors heap new slogans upon the educational system…when even the old ones have not yet been sorted and implemented! It is too much.” (I-A16) And as one MoEYS official put it: “we waste a lot of time on things like gender, AIDS… extra-curricular things” (I-P42).

One of the best ways to understand the practical implications of hosting so many different donors for present-day education in Cambodia is to hear what older educators themselves are saying – to acknowledge the voice of women and men who have actively engaged with learning and teaching, planning and implementation under a variety of regimes. Three themes that clearly and consistently emerge are: fragmentation and lack of coherence,
confusing donor agenda which directly impacts classroom activity and not just the policy level. This third point is well illustrated by an interview excerpt in Box 10 below.

**Box 10: Reflections on a fragmented donor agenda**

<table>
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<th>The influence of international donors on the education system: an educator’s reflections</th>
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| **JKR:** So are you saying that the education system was better before than it is now – that before, the curriculum was stronger?  
**I-P42:** I don’t know exactly; but what I think is that the course, the people who make the curriculum [now] don’t have good experience/skills. What I do know is that in high school they changed from France, Francophone to Anglophone. But there are many Anglophone ways – like Malaysia way, Singapore way, American way, Canada way. So everyone takes part-and-part and just mixes it together. So that is not a good way to connect. This is just my observation. If you copy one system, from US or France, you copy all! It could be stronger if you copy one system and do not piece it together like now. I believe that! Because the people who make that curriculum they do not think about all about connections. Why not? The people who survived from Pol Pot regime they do not have enough knowledge to think about that....  
In my time, university professors have PhD in biology or physics. There are some who come from France with PhD to teach. And they copy the French education system. I believe that way is better than just taking one part from that country and one part from another country and mixing it together. They think it is good for students too; but it is not! This is my observation.  
**JKR:** So the education system now is maybe not so unified? Why is that?  
**I-P42:** We cannot say unified. We can say it has changed according to the Government. And it changes according to the donor. When Japan comes, they do like that. In the National Institute of Education, Japanese come and they say do this way and then add that; do a new programme in this and that class. So it changes. And we believe on these people that they can make our students more knowledgeable so we accept their ideas/way.  
And the other thing is that there are many other courses, what we call extra-curricular courses coming, like gender, like AIDS. So we waste a lot of time on that! According to the donor they just change; they want to add more! Do they think our system not enough?  
And you know when they are like that, the textbook is also not on time. Because even the group who makes the textbooks, how is the level of them? Sometimes they pass the book here to make me or other people edit. But even that book is not good. We just make corrections to what they write; but we cannot make big corrections... It is not our capacity to correct. We cannot add more or change, even if there are some [factual errors] ...

Though not explicitly identified by stakeholders as a problem, failure of the MoEYS to recognise that “deliberate adoption of foreign approaches [to education] creates enormous problems since the local context is often alien to the implementation of policy and practice
which have developed under quite different circumstances” (Phillips, 2005, p. 555) also adversely influences education. The end result too often is wasted resources and poor quality education for Cambodians, regardless of what level they study.

Furthermore, given the tendency for hierarchy and centralisation, the sheer volume of NGO influence and resourcing can have the adverse affect of diminishing or even precluding a sense of local ownership for various aspects of the educational endeavour. For instance, the PC School Committee members described one of their main activities as keeping children in school because “KAPE doesn’t want any of the children to drop out” (I-P54). Teachers in one FGD said “KAPE led us to study CFS. KAPE wants to have student-centred study. When KAPE assists the schools, we must do our best for them!” These comments would seem to indicate an extrinsic rather than intrinsic motivation which may be susceptible to the NGO presence and/or NGO funding. External resourcing may also have an even more insidious effect. When asked about student support initiatives, one Khmer man with 20-years experience working for an education-focused INGO opined that: “Giving scholarships turns them into beggars …now the community will not help.” (I-A16)

At the local level, NGOs have tended to inject money to ensure that certain aspects function, for instance, offering a life skills component or helping slow learners through home-based tutoring. Rationale is that teachers are already underpaid and overworked, so without additional incentive they would not be able (much less have desire) to implement some of the components of CFS. However, with the cessation of the funding, the activities completely stop (see also C-Y. Kim, 2011a, p. 501). For instance, at one cluster school, a large bio-gas facility, taking up a quarter of the school yard, lay dormant. The school cook informed the RT that they cook with wood because “It has been broken for a long time already.” Teachers at two
other cluster schools explained: “Before, we went to visit slow learners in their home. Sometimes we gathered them together if they lived nearby each other. But we stopped because it was too expensive and the donor stopped providing incentive to do it.” As a final example, the administrative team at Sala Phum (I-P56) lamented: “We don’t have life skills [classes] now because we have no support, no money to buy supplies. We had tailoring [for girls] last year. But hygiene, washing hands, that is an ‘easy life skill’ and we can do that.”

**Geopolitical Space and Regional Issues**

There is little reference in the literature on education in Cambodia which deals with the geopolitical space that Cambodia occupies, and the nature/extent of influence from regional actors such as Australia, China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and constellations such as the Greater Mekong Sub-region. Yet these countries are enormously influential both economically and politically as they vie for influence, resources, and markets in Cambodia by constructing roads and bridges, building schools and printing textbooks, erecting telecommunication towers, signing trade agreements, and so forth. Further, the priorities and conditions of their assistance seem often to run counter to practices promoted by Western institutions. One very obvious example is China, which provides grants (rather than loans) for projects that other donors (like the World Bank) deny funding to for environmental reasons. Another is Korean companies who are granted land title for urban sites already occupied. There are few (English language) documents produced by or written from the perspectives of these countries, nor is there much information about the shape of the aid from non-Western, regional sources. Yet clearly this aid does have a significant influence on government policy and practice in various spheres, and on terms quite different than those that characterise Western aid and development strategies.
A second geopolitical reality for Cambodia, this one much easier to observe, is membership in the regional bloc Association of South East Nations (ASEAN). ASEAN’s influence on its ten member nations is increasingly being felt in domestic affairs, not least in education. For example, ASEAN’s choice of English as its common language influenced MoEYS’s decision to offer English as a foreign language in lower levels of school. Further, the imminent launch of the ASEAN Community in 2015, which will initiate a free flow of professionals and skilled workers among the ten member states, has recently been another catalyst in MoEYS discussions about education reform, particularly the linkages with labour market issues.

At the 27th ASEAN Council of Teachers (ACT) convention in Brunei in March 2012, many stakeholders highlighted several issues as requiring serious consideration by the Ministries tasked with education in all member states. While some of these clearly are not on Cambodia’s priority list, they do give an indication of future regional trends which will doubtless have a direct bearing on Cambodia’s education system. That list is in Table 8 below.

<table>
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<th>Table 8: ASEAN educational priorities (ACT, 2012)</th>
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<td><strong>ASEAN Educational Priorities</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Standardised assessment</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Accountability</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Regional models of education</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Global market competitiveness</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Harmonised standards</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Global market competitiveness</strong></td>
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The meeting’s final report records that members are urged to take four priority actions, two of which are relevant here. First, “the disparity in standard and quality of education needs to be
bridged by establishing benchmarks and common standards for ASEAN education, especially with regards to education management information system and qualification, remuneration, professional ethics and rights.” And the second priority is that: “There must be updates on the achievements and progress made by ASEAN member countries, as endorsed in previous resolutions, in order to ensure continuity of efforts and progress in working towards achieving quality education.” Clearly, to understand the full picture of formal education in Cambodia, attention must be paid to the nature and scope of (actual and potential) regional influences on the educational enterprise in Cambodia. Yet this seldom features in RGC policy documents, multilateral agency plans, or NGO reports.

**Economics / poverty**

Obviously Cambodia’s economic system and status will have a direct impact on its ability to provide education. While national contribution to education expenditure has been gradually increasing, the majority of funds are still provided by foreign donors. Cambodia has the lowest income tax base in Asia (World Bank, 2006a, 2007), and one of the highest corruption ratings (158/180 with 1 being the least corrupt – Transparency International, 2009), so it is difficult to know how or when this situation might be reversed.

More than half the population lives below the World Bank’s designated poverty line, and the majority of the population is engaged in subsistence agriculture (World Bank, 2006). There is virtually no industry in Cambodia, with a single type - garment manufacturing – accounting for roughly 14 percent of the country's GDP and for 82 percent of exports, as well as employing 45 percent of its manufacturing workforce (“Cambodia's garment industry has evolved,” 2008). The income and quality of life disparities between urban and rural dwellers are growing markedly. And finally, Cambodia has the highest rate of child labour in Southeast
Asia with “poverty” most commonly cited as the cause. These conditions are likely to affect individual and family decisions and perceptions of education; and to affect how local people understand and receive foreign concepts relating to education.

Given the extent of economic poverty in Cambodia, it is perhaps not surprising that a poverty discourse prevails. Some variation on the “poverty discourse” is used by individuals at the grassroots, NGO workers, the multilateral donor community, and the RGC to explain virtually all social, moral, and political failings at national and individual level. Seldom is any more explanation given (or required?) than: “Poverty, therefore failure.” While it is true that the absence of (adequate) funding may impede or preclude implementation of sound policies and achievement of “development,” it is not true that the presence of funding will guarantee success. Money is simply one variable in a complex formula that also includes political will, individual agency, and a myriad of socio-cultural factors.

**Girls’ access to education**

Despite progressive policy rhetoric, girls’ access to formal education in Cambodia is still limited. This is clearly indicated by enrolment figures, with male-biased gender differentiation beginning in lower secondary and growing to mammoth proportions in higher education. Sustained participation is constrained not so much by formal obstacles as by persistent socio-cultural norms which favour males over females. Not only is discrimination against females evident at student level, it also persists throughout the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports as evidenced by a lack of females in leadership positions as demonstrated in Appendix 8.
Statistical picture of “girls in school”

Despite the past two decades of serious effort, extensive technical assistance from various UN agencies, as well as multiple international donors, and millions of foreign aid dollars aimed at improving the educational system and facilities in Cambodia, just over half of all students (53 percent) who enrol in grade 1 actually go on to complete grade 6 (UNICEF, 2009b, p. 127). In 2010 far fewer than half the country’s girls completed lower secondary (only about 40 percent of children eligible enrolled in lower secondary (RGC/MoP, 2011, p. 17); and just 47.3 percent of the total number of girls who started lower secondary completed the full three years) or upper secondary school (just 22.5 percent of girls who started upper secondary completed the full three years) (MoEYS, 2010, p. 7). This stands in marked contrast to Cambodia’s neighbours. In 2009, the East Asia and Pacific regional gross enrolment rate for girls in secondary school was 80 percent compared to just 28 percent for Cambodian girls (UNICEF, 2009a). Domestically, almost twice as many Cambodian boys as girls attend upper secondary school (grades 9-12). And, 85 percent of all out-of-school-children in Cambodia are girls (UNICEF, 2009a, p. 34).

The overall survival rate for children from grades 1-6 (primary school) is 61.7 percent and the figure for girls is slightly higher, at 63.8 percent (MoEYS, 2010, p. 7). The overall survival rate for grades 1-9 (basic education) is just 37.2 percent; and 37.9 percent for girls (p. 7). Fewer females than males repeat a grade at all levels (primary, lower, and upper secondary); fewer females than males drop out at primary and upper secondary level, but more girls than boys drop out in the lower secondary level (p. 7). While primary school enrolment and completion for boys and girls is virtually equal, the gender gap widens noticeably in favour of boys from Grade 4 up through post-secondary levels (UNICEF, 2009a, p. 26; Velasco,
Literacy rates are another indicator that overall mean levels of education favour males. The gap between literacy rates for male and female youth (ages 15-24) is gradually closing: in 1998 the Gender Parity Index for youth literacy was 0.87, and by 2004 it had reached 0.90 (MoEYS, 2007d, p. 177). In real terms this translates to 23 percent of women age 15-24 who are illiterate, compared to 16 percent of same-age males. The gap widens for adults: 40 percent of women age 25-44 are illiterate compared to 22 percent of men (UNICEF, 2009a, p. 41).

Clearly, although access for virtually every Cambodian is still an issue, where there are educational opportunities and financial resources available, males are given preference. So while the Cambodian constitution renders women and men equal before the law, and especially the education sector has made significant publicised effort to reduce male-biased gender disparity, still – a myriad of strongly-held cultural and religiously-reinforced beliefs about the inferiority of females, and the (domestic) roles that girls/women are expected to fulfil, have a direct impact on whether or not girls even get to school (Bredenberg, Lon & Ma, 2003; Chansopheak, 2009; Gorman, 1999; Velasco, 2001). These conditions partially explain why the ratio of females to males diminishes as education levels increase.

**Why girls do not attend school**

One of the most often cited reasons for why girls do not attend and/or complete school is that girls bear a disproportionate responsibility for domestic chores such as child-minding and cooking. Additionally, Cambodia has the highest rates of child economic activity in all of East and Southeast Asia (World Bank, 2006c) so it is likely that labour-for-wage is another distraction from schooling. And in the event of limited resources boys are preferred for formal education because they are thought to be more intelligent and more valuable than girls (CARE-MoEYS, 1998; Fiske, 1995). Furthermore, it is still common in rural areas for parents to
express reluctance to allow girls to attend school because girls are too physically weak to walk long distances; and worse, they will learn to write love letters [subtext: as a result they will lose their virginity] (CARE-MoEYS, 1998; Smith-Heffner, 1993; Velasco, 2001). Of course there are also practical limitations to participation: personal security enroute to schools (which in rural areas are often far from homes) and a lack of toilet facilities are additional barriers to education for girls (Bredenberg, Lon, & Ma, 2003). These obstacles for female participation as students, have an obvious domino effect on the numbers of female teachers, administrators, and principals in the education system overall. Reportedly, the ways that Cambodian male teachers treat female students reflects this belief in the intellectual and physical inferiority of girls, and has also been shown to have a negative influence on female participation (Gorman, 1999; Velasco, 2001).

To ascertain actual reasons for female (non)attendance at school and the presence of changing perceptions about “girls and school,” the research queried female residents of the host village about their personal experience with formal education. Several grandmothers reported attending school in the 1950s under Sihanouk (these women are now in the mid to late 60s…), most by choice and some because elders “forced” them. These women tended to be from families that had some assets and were not subsistence farmers. In some instances, they were sent to live with relatives in urban areas expressly so they could attend school which their parents could otherwise not afford. Further, some women who had not been schooled in the 1950s attended village-based literacy classes in the 1960s, or were taught by their literate husbands to read and write. In several cases, women said that when they were children, the domestic work load was too great to allow them to attend school. One grandmother laughed loudly and simply stated: “there were too many children to care for!” Another reported that
she and her younger sister did not go to school as children “because we had no oxen and had to plough the field by our backs” (I-P83). One result was that, absolved of responsibility for farm labour or domestic chores, this grandmother’s multiple male siblings could and did attend school.

Some women said that their fear of harsh corporal punishment prevented them from attending school: “I was afraid to be hit. At that time the teacher really hit students. Some students got hit and got bruised and some students were even bleeding!” (I-P2) Several grandmothers who did attend school suggested that a big reason why other girls did not attend school was because they were afraid of being “caught” (klaycht kay chap badt – I-P80), a common euphemism for rape. Related to this, another common reason expressed for parentally prescribed non-attendance is that “parents were afraid that if girls were literate, they would write love letters.” Ensuing explanation revealed this as an obtuse way of saying that parents did not want their daughters to attend school because they wanted their girls to avoid sexual impropriety.

In discussion about why boys and girls historically did/did not attend school, an interesting phenomenon was implicitly posed as yet another reason why fewer girls than boys did/do obtain a formal education. Village residents spoke of informal mechanisms for males/females to demonstrate gratitude to parents; these appeared to run in favour of males. Traditionally (that is, before the 1950s) sons were sent to a local wat (Buddhist temple) to study/gain literacy skills and to learn how to be respectful and have good (appropriate) behaviour. Males who studied, or did any kind of service in the wat, were well-respected in the community regardless of how long/short their term was. For a boy, villagers explained, the gratitude debt is expunged as soon as wat service is completed – no matter what a male child does after that, his family keeps the merit and the boy is not expected to do more to repay
“milk money.” However, for females, the “*t’ley tek dah*” (lit. *price of [mother’s] milk*) is a life-long debt which can never be fully repaid (I-P37). Partial repayment occurs if a woman marries, as then her spouse pays a “dowry” (*t’ley tek da*) to the mother/caregiver who raised the girl. This permanent debt is one reason why girls comply with parental demands even when they don’t agree with those requests. As one old grandmother explained, her (female) friend whose mother forbid her attending school as a child, was “cheated by her mother but she had no choice.” Thus, it is to girls that the major weight of care for aging parents eventually falls; and their life choices more likely circumscribed by “the greater good” of the extended family unit.

**Women in educational leadership**

The MoEYS publicly recognises the dearth of females in positions of leadership and authority within its structure, statistically demonstrated in Appendix 8, but has no specific plans for addressing this. In fact, the Prime Minister’s response to the idea of a quota system in any part of government is that, because he believes in equality of women, women must achieve such positions on their own merit not because they are given any particular advantage. The situation within MoEYS simply reflects the national reality of women being severely under-represented at levels of government. For example, just 8/61 Senate members are female (13 percent) and 15/123 of National Assembly members are female (12 percent) (UNDP, 2010). Among Secretaries of State, just 8/172 (4.6 percent) are female (RGC/MoP, 2010, p. 20). There are no female provincial governors (RGC/MoP, 2010, p. 20). In the 2008 commune council election, about 15 percent of councillors voted in were female (PeaceWomen, 2010). About ten percent of municipal and provincial council members are
female and 12.6 percent of city, district and commune council members are female (PeaceWomen, 2010).

As for the specific details of female leadership within MoEYS: 1/8 Secretaries of State and 1/10 Under-Secretaries of State are female; 2/26 (8 percent) Department Directors and 13/79 (16 percent) Vice Directors are female. For Regional Pedagogical Centres, 40 percent of Directors are female, but no Vice Directors are female (0/11). Women are very well represented in all positions relating to pre-school: 1/1 Director and 1/1 Vice Director of Central Pre-School; 143/143 Directors and 22/22 Vice Directors of pre-schools; and 98 percent of pre-school teachers are women. Women comprise 49 percent of primary school teachers and 38 percent of lower secondary school teachers. However, just 4 percent of Directors of upper secondary school are women (12 percent of Director positions), 5 percent of lower secondary school Directors (12 percent), 10 percent of primary school Directors and 20 percent of primary school Vice Directors. The Head of the Gender Working Group explained the situation (in cultural terms) and the MoEYS strategy (which focuses on pushing women) for addressing these disparities as shown in Box 11 below:

**Box 11: Official explanation for pushing women to address gender disparities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Official explanation for pushing women to address gender disparities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...if you talk about promoting to get higher positions, then we can see that the women are less than men. I want to tell you also that it is Khmer’s habit to be shy. For example there is a meeting which have 30-40-50 people in it; and of these, women might be only 3-5 in number. And the leader is not a woman but is a man. So in this case, when women share their ideas, the leader of the meeting [often] speaks strongly [n’eyey bongkrope = can include to speak over, ignore, disparage, etc.] and so the women stop and become quiet. And the other 3-4 women in the meeting, when they see this, they dare not to speak. Women must be quiet and wait/listen [s’trey trev tye nev-skiem cham s’dap rohote]. I mean that the number of women is less and they have less power and are weak; so that is why we need to promote women more. In order to promote gender, our team provides leadership training for women – the purpose of this training is to make [female participants] to be brave in sharing ideas. This is not to say that women have lower knowledge [ka che-dung] than men, or lower capacity/ability. It’s just that</td>
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Official explanation for pushing women to address gender disparities

things prevent women from speaking out and being involved. They both [women and men] have the same capacity, but it is just that have fewer women in MoEYS makes it that women dare not exercise [use] their rights because they are smaller in number and their ideas are not accepted [men do not listen].

Now we try to help them [women] understand more clearly [tve oween s’trey yule-dung oween khantye chba] about their rights and encourage them to be brave in sharing.

The Educational Landscape in Contemporary Cambodia

This section provides a picture of the educational landscape from existing literature, on three areas of particular interest and concern to promoters of the global educational agenda – national educational achievement, statistics against globally sanctioned educational indicators, and classroom (pedagogical) practice. Cambodian education can be explained, in part, by Cambodia’s designation as a post-conflict, low-income country with a low Human Development Index (HDI) rating (Cambodia is listed as 137/182 nations). These particular labels suggest, for instance, that lack of physical infrastructure and instructional materials, low secondary level retention, gender disparity in favour of males, corruption, and exogenous funding and accountability requirements will characterise the education system, as indeed they do. In many respects, then, Cambodia resembles other countries in these same categories.

It is also possible to partially explain the country’s current education system by acknowledging that Cambodia is similar to other aid-dependent nations. Here, as elsewhere, the multilateral education apparatus has shaped national educational policy so that it reflects global trends such as Education for All and the MDG, and related curricular and pedagogical emphasis. However, it is important to note that while in some ways the Cambodian educational situation is comparable with other post-conflict low income nations, in other ways the Cambodian context is unique because of socio-historic and religious influences, an unusually long succession of imperial powers, as well as the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime.
Overall educational attainment

A recent World Bank study (2008) succinctly describes the current state of education:

Cambodia performs poorly on most metrics related to education….The average Cambodian has barely completed six years of school. About 20% of Cambodian females and 10% of Cambodian males have never attended school and regardless of gender, another 60% have attained no more than a primary education. About 4% of females and 8% of males have some high school and only 2.5% of females and 5% of males have some tertiary education. Residents of Phnom Penh have higher attainment than those of other urban areas, who in turn have higher attainment than residents of rural areas. Accessibility has clearly increased since 2004, particularly in rural areas as there is a decline across the board in those who have never attended school with rural areas registering the largest decline of about twelve percentage points. The proportion of the population in rural areas with incomplete primary education has remained stagnant at about 40 percent. (Lall, 2008, p. 1-2)

National literacy rates remain perhaps the best indicators for overall educational attainment in a given country. Though contentious, literacy rates in Cambodia, as published by UNESCO for 2008 stand at 77.6 percent overall for the population aged 15+ (85.1 percent of males and 70.9 percent of females). This is compared to a regional average in 2009 of 94.0 percent, 96.5 percent, and 91.4 percent respectively. [NB. RGC figures in the MDG report are cited as: 95% for females aged 15-25, and 86 percent for females aged 25 and older.]. Figures for youth (aged 15-24 years) are slightly better, though still clearly in favour of males: 87.5 percent overall, 89.4 percent for males, and 85.5 percent for females. Again, Cambodia fares quite poorly for this sub-population too, in a regional comparative perspective which shows the 2009 regional average to be 98.8 percent (total m/f), 98.9 percent (males), and 98.7 percent (females). Clearly, by statistical measures aimed at determining how effective a system is at inculcating knowledge in participants, Cambodia’s system is faltering in its vision to provide high quality education to equip its citizens to become productive and moral members of the regional and global knowledge economy.
Current statistics on education

Quality indicators aside, there are several conventional indicators employed to demonstrate a nation’s educational progress: it is helpful to consider these indicators for different levels of education too (i.e. primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, higher education) rather than for education in general. Each indicator provides a slightly different angle on the issue in question. And the more specific one can be about the location or population, the more useful these indicators are as well (i.e. comparing rural vs. urban net enrolment rate (NER), or comparing NER by province).

The major globally prescribed indicators employed are: NER, net attendance rate (NAR), survival rate, promotion rate, transition rate, graduation rate, repetition rate, drop-out rate, gender parity index (GPI), and pupil-teacher ratio (PTR). Measured against this quantitative frame, Cambodia is making significant progress toward producing a more-educated and better-educated public. See Table 9 below for details. Though useful, these statistical measures have obvious shortcomings. For instance, the number of children registered as enrolled/attending does not necessarily represent the number of children actively and regularly attending school – this is perhaps even more an issue in Cambodia where schools are allocated an annual budget based on a “head count” figure submitted by school Directors. Further, total number of children enrolled does not provide information about how well these children progress through the system. Additionally, drop-out and repetition rates remain high.
Table 9: Statistical overview of Cambodian education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATISTICAL OVERVIEW OF CAMBODIAN EDUCATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net enrolment ratio (NER)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>NER is the number of pupils of the theoretical school-age group for a given level of education, expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age group. In 2008, Cambodia’s NER at primary level (grades 1-6) was 92.2 for urban location, 95.3 for rural locations, and 90.3 for remote schools (Cambodia RGC/MoP, 2011, p. 16). The regional NER average is 94 (UIS, 2011). The figures at lower secondary school level (LSS) are not nearly as impressive: 48.3 percent in urban locales, 28.8 percent in rural places, and 11.3 percent in remote locations. The MDG report suggests “The LSS NER is low mainly because of slow progress of flow rates in Primary Schools and the high level of dropout in Lower Secondary Schools. It will not be possible to affect the LSS NER substantially until the internal efficiency in primary education is drastically improved” (RGC/MoP, 2011, p. 17).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gross enrolment ratio (GER)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>GER is defined as: “the number of pupils enrolled in a given level of education regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population in the theoretical age group for that level of education” (UNESCO/UIS, 2011). The GER for primary school in Cambodia is 95 (boys and girls combined) (World Bank, 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net attendance rate (NAR)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The standard definition for NAR is: “number of pupils in the official age group for a given level of education who attend school in that level, expressed as a percentage of the population that age group” (UNESCO/UIS, 2010a). UNICEF reports apply a modified definition “that also considers children who are attending higher levels of education” (UNICEF, nd). In Cambodia, NAR for primary level boy participants is 84% and for females is 86%.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Flow rate</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Flow rate is a figure comprised of promotion rate, repetition rate, and drop-out rates. The Cambodian primary promotion rate in 2008 was 82.8%; repetition rate was 8.9%; and 8.3% of enrolled children dropped out rate. Slightly more boys than girls repeat grades as well as drop-out. Based on the trend of stagnation since 2000-2001 of these figures in the primary grades, Cambodia has revised its goal of 100% NER for lower secondary, to 53% by 2015 (RGC/MoP, 2011, p. 17). UNESCO presents figures are slightly higher in regard to repetition rate (10%) (UNESCO/UIS, 2010b).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transition rate</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO figures suggest that about 80% of all children enrolled in grade 6, transition into grade 7. (UNESCO/UIS, 2011).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Repetition rate</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The repetition rate refers to the proportion of students from a cohort enrolled in a given grade who studies in the same grade in the following school year. For the 2008/2009 SY, the repetition rate for primary school was 8.9 percent; and for lower secondary it was 2.3 percent (UNESCO/IBE, 2011).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drop-out rate</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>At primary level, the overall dropout rate for 2008/2009 SY was 8.2 percent; for lower secondary, this figure climbs to 18.8 percent (UNESCO/IBE, 2011).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### STATISTICAL OVERVIEW OF CAMBODIAN EDUCATION

#### Survival rate

Survival rate simply refers to the percentage of a cohort of students enrolled in the first grade of a given level or cycle of education in a given school year who reach successive grades. In 2009/2010 SY, the survival rate for boys/girls combined for Grades 1-6 was reported as 61.7 percent; 37.2 percent survival rate for Grades 1-9. For the period 1996-2008, the survival rate for Grades 1-12 was just 11 percent (UNESCO, 2010a, p. 23).

#### Completion rate

MoEYS (2010) estimates completion rate for 2009/2010 SY for primary school at 83.2 percent; and 48.7 percent for lower secondary level.

#### General educational achievement

In 2007, only 24 percent of Cambodian children completed lower secondary school, 15.6 percent upper secondary school, and just 2.7 percent completed tertiary education (Mishra, 2011).

#### Gender parity index (GPI)

Simply defined as the ratio of girls to boys with 1.0 being the aim, GPI for primary level as at 2008 was 0.996, up from 0.94 in 2000; and for lower secondary level was 1.120, a figure up from 0.75 in the year 2000. The RGC’s report proclaims: “Gender disparities in primary and lower secondary education have been eliminated and in the case of LSS, they have been reversed, probably as a result of an aggressive policy of providing scholarships to poor girls in grades 7 to 9” (RGC/MoP, 2011, p. 18). The picture is quite different for upper secondary (US) and tertiary education levels for which GPI is reported to be 72.9 for the former, and 57.5 for the latter (RGC/MoP, 2011, p. 19).

#### Pupil-teacher ratio (PTR)

Primary school pupil-teacher ratio is the number of pupils enrolled in primary school divided by the number of primary school teachers (regardless of their teaching assignment). According to WB reports, the PTR primary in Cambodia is holding steady at around 50 students per teacher: 48.45 in 2010; 49.08 in 2009; 48.54 in 2008, according to the World Bank. The figure reported by UNESCO for 2009/2010 SY was 49.2 pupils per primary school teacher.

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**The cost of education in Cambodia**

A recent CDRI study (Fitzgerald & Sovannarith, 2007) found that educational expenditure per household per child-in-school fell by 44 percent across all nine study villages between 2001 and 2004/05, though more children were staying in school longer (p. 103). This was also found to be the case by Bray & Bunly (2005) in their landmark comparative study of schooling costs in Cambodia – they reported at least a 50 percent reduction for most primary grades in actual cost between 1987/1988 and 2004. The WB estimates that in the 1997/1998...
SY, households had contributed a massive 76.9 percent of the overall cost of primary education, compared with 55.6 percent of overall cost in 2004 (World Bank, 2005a, p. 66). It is widely acknowledged that the largest single contributor to this drop was the official eradication of formal school fees and commencement of the MoEYS’s Priority Action Plan (PAP) (World Bank, 2005a) which ensured that a greater proportion of budgeted MoEYS’s funds actually reached schools.

Nevertheless, household expenditure for education remains substantial. Bray & Bunly’s 2005 figures for annual household cost by rural pupil per grade is 83,200 riel (USD $20.80) for Grade 4, rising to 91,900 riel (USD $22.97) for Grade 5, and hitting 107,200 riel (USD $26.80) for Grade 6 (Bray & Bunly, 2005, p. 49). While in absolute terms education costs are relatively low at primary level, for rural families direct education-related expenses can amount to nearly a quarter of total non-food expenditure for children in grade 7; and 45 percent of non-food expenditure when children reach grade 12 (World Bank, 2005, p. 64). For the time being, educational costs represent an investment risk that many families cannot afford.

**Returns to education**

It now, literally, pays for Cambodians to go to school, though only moderately:

In 1997, the earnings of workers employed for wages exhibited limited association to education and skills, with the university educated workers earning just twice as much as those with no formal schooling. In 2003 and 2007, the average earnings of a university graduate were 3 and 3.3 times the earnings of those with no formal schooling, respectively. (Lall & Sakellariou, 2010, p. 351)

Linkages between formal education and employment have been the subject of some recent major studies in Cambodia (HRNIC, 2010; Lall & Sakellariou, 2010; RGC/NIS, 2010; World

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22 These amounts include items in eight different categories: registration and record books, uniforms and equipment, learning materials, supplementary tutoring, tests and examinations, transport, pocket money, and other expenses.
Bank, 2012b), this soul searching prompted in part by imminent ASEAN integration. These reports identify gaps in basic education which impede capacity to eventually gain additional skills or gain employment, as well as emphasise the need for a better match between skills learned in Cambodia’s education and training institutes and skills required by the local and regional labour market. Specifically identified were poor work attitudes among unskilled labourers; management, supervision, and decision-making skills for middle management; and analytical skills amongst professional workers (World Bank, 2012b, p. 1). Workers with basic literacy and numeracy skills are also still in short supply.

The skill supply deficit at all levels of the employment spectrum is worrying for two reasons. First, in the past decade a relatively large number of students have graduated annually with tertiary education certification but more than half of employers surveyed by the WB indicated that the people they employ are under-skilled. Second, Cambodia’s large supply of unskilled labour biases investment toward low-skilled, labour-intensive production currently, and this bias also constrains future employment opportunities (World Bank, 2012b, p. 4).

**Current classroom practice**

A clear and consistent picture of the way that education is enacted in Cambodia emerges from recent research. Studies addressing various aspects and levels of Cambodia’s education system – from evaluation of an early childhood education pilot (Nonoyama & Bredenberg, 2008), to exploration of children’s knowledge construction processes (Reyes, 2009), to analysis of results of grade six student achievement (Marshall et al., 2009), to inquiry about community participation (Shoraku, 2008a) – all include similar observations. In the classroom, teachers dominate in one-way communication intended to provide knowledge to students, and offer little room for student interaction: students rarely initiate inquiry, even in
simple matters such as clarifying instructions. Construction of such a composite image facilitates identification of patterns, analysis of which may shed light on (generally held) underlying assumptions, beliefs, values from which these practices arises.

In a World Bank study of teacher competency in Cambodia, Duthilleul (2005) records that “teachers in Cambodia today see their job more as knowledge transfer than as knowledge generation” (p. 98) and that:

…teachers-to-be tended to emphasize the importance of subject mater mastery as a key characteristic of an excellent teacher, one who is capable to “transmit this knowledge to the students.” Excellent teachers are also expected to be well prepared, work hard and be a good role model for students. The dominance of a knowledge transfer model was present at all levels among the stakeholder interviewed and in the lessons observed. (Duthilleul, 2005, p. 95)

Observers report little deviation by teacher/s from word-for-word citation of official curriculum guide/s (Benveniste, Marshall & Araujo, 2008; Courtney, 2008; Maskell & Garang, 1998). Because focus is on delivery of pre-packaged factual information, effort is seldom made to contextualise for local situation/s (Knibbs & Price, 2009; Tan, 2007). Even in grade one, the curriculum is heavily academic rather than interactive or experiential (Nonoyama & Bredenberg, 2008), a pattern which persists through all levels of basic education. Further, Velasco (2001, 2004) notes little awareness of, and no effort to cater to, different cognitive styles; though her observation is in the context of a gender analysis, this critique can also be extended to learning styles more generally. Students spend the majority of classroom time copying from the board, taking down teacher dictation, or chanting in unison (King, 2003; Marshall et al., 2009; Reyes, 2009).

Administrative and policy-setting practices are also constrained by the prevailing centralised, top-down, authoritarian structure, a system that does not facilitate dialogue and participation among key stakeholders. Teachers report that they are rarely aware of the
reason/s for different policy moves and even more seldom part of decision-making processes at
their own school much less engaged at higher (provincial or national) level (Knight &
MacLeod, 2004; Shoraku, 2006; VSO & NEP, 2008). Further, teachers say that they are more
often simply recipients of instructions for teaching and assessment activities, than genuine
participants in conversation about educational philosophy and pedagogy (King, 2003). The
general failure to provide conceptual rationale has likely limited the effectiveness of much of
the teacher training conducted over the past decade (Courtney, 2008).

No doubt there are exceptions to these observations. Furthermore, logistical and
material explanations abound for contemporary classroom practice, including low levels of
teacher education, insufficient numbers of textbooks and other basic supplies, and a primary
school student-teacher ratio of 51:1 which is the highest in the region (Benveniste, Marshall &
Araujo, 2008; Chhin & Dy, 2009; Duggan, 1996; Dy, 2004). However, the fact that this is the
situation after more than a decade of intense interaction with international pedagogues, multi-
millions of dollars in resourcing, national teacher training campaigns, and implementation of
key policy initiatives demonstrated to work in other low-income countries, suggests that in
addition to making structural changes, political and cultural considerations must also be
recognised and incorporated into educational practice (Ayers, 2000, 2003; Shoraku, 2006;
Sloper, 1999).

**Eight current challenges**

Apart from discussions about degrees of control and collaboration with donors, and
conversation around educational quality, and the as-yet-unknown influence of ASEAN and
regional politics, there are several additional critical issues dominating the educational stage in
Cambodia. They are only briefly mentioned here, as a way to demonstrate the way that
external forces influence domestic policy, the strength of economic influences on Cambodia’s policy response, and to foreshadow possible future changes and trends in educational delivery in Cambodia.

First, an on-going concern is the fact that international donors still finance the major proportion of national education in Cambodia and there is little to suggest that the RGC is interested in reversing this trend. A second long running concern is the economic inequality characterising Cambodia today (World Bank, 2007): “based on the comparable socio-economic surveys of 1993/4 and 2003/4, the richest 20 percent of the population managed to increase their well-being, measured by household consumption, by 56 percent, while the poorest 20 percent improved by only 8 percent” (Sok, 2007, p. 2). The World Bank (2009) notes further that:

> rapid economic growth between 2004 and 2007 has been associated not only with falling poverty but also with rising levels of inequality….the overall Gini coefficient (a summary measure of inequality in which a value of zero signifies perfect equality and a value of 1 signifies perfect inequality) for per capita consumption is estimated to have increased from 0.39 to 0.43 during the period 2004 to 2007. (World Bank (2009, p. ix)

Poverty is a primarily rural phenomenon, with roughly 91 percent of “the poor” living in rural areas (Engvall, Sjoberg & Sjoholm, 2007). Income, which clearly has a spatial dimension (rural vs. urban), also has a direct impact on educational opportunities: just 3.3 percent of the poorest quintile of Cambodians enrolled in lower secondary school in 2004 compared with 36.4 percent of the richest quintile; and one percent of the poorest enrolled in upper secondary in contrast to 22.5 percent of those in the richest quintile (Sok, 2007, p.8).

A third issue, relating to economic inequality, is the quality differential between urban and rural schooling, far superior for the former than the latter; and the concomitant access implications for higher education. Generally speaking, urban schools (and in this regard,
Phnom Penh must also be contrasted as relatively better than other urban locations) have lower teacher-student ratios; much better physical facilities, equipment, and access to more and better materials; consistent electricity and thus the option for computer and internet access; greater access to additional documentary resources; greater access to higher quality tutoring; and so forth. As 85 percent of Cambodians, and 91 percent of her poor, still live in rural areas, this quality differential represents a significant barrier to “equality” and may portend future social unrest as economic opportunities and outcomes consistently favour the non-poor.

Fourth, the contemporary public-private hybrid education which has emerged since the early 1990s has direct implications for access and equality. As Brehm & Silova (in press) describe it:

…private tutoring has emerged as an essential part of the public education system. A mastery of the required curriculum is now possible only through a careful combination of public schooling and private tutoring. Only those who can afford private tutoring thus receive access to the complete national education (sic) and have greater opportunities to successfully graduate from public school.

The fifth major feature is yet another access-related issue, and that is a dearth of females at higher levels of education. As the RGC’s recent report on progress toward the MDG clearly states, though there is steady improvement at upper secondary level in the ratio of females to males, for tertiary education this is not the case. Nationally, about half as many females as males have some high school (4 percent vs. 8 percent) and for tertiary level, just 2.5 percent of females compared to 5 percent of males have attended any at all (Lall, 2008, pp. 1-2). In 2008, just 5.4 percent of total eligible females (according to age) were enrolled in tertiary educational institutes, while the figure for males is double that (10.23 percent) (WB, 2010). Female students in higher education institutions comprise only about 22 percent of the
total enrolment (Lee, 2007). Unequal access to education limits women’s ability to assume leadership in communities, business, and politics.

Sixth, corruption in the education system is endemic. In one recent survey, around 72 percent of households reported that they paid “extra money” in the education sector (Nissen, 2009). It is most visibly expressed as rampant cheating on national exams, a phenomenon that annually warrants coverage in Khmer-language news, both of the nation’s major English-language newspapers, and regional news sources. Implications of this are obvious. In a special issue on “Employment & Education: Building a Future for Cambodia” (June 13-16, 2008) the Phnom Penh Post quoted an Australian teacher at one of the most prestigious and respected English institutes in the country, the Australian Centre for Education (ACE):

> Despite the strict standards she demands in her English lessons at [ACE], all of her students have openly admitted to her that they cheat in other classes. ‘It’s giving them a false sense of what they know and the country a false sense of what their graduates are capable of,’ she said, ‘How can you hire someone with a qualification when they are not required to learn anything to gain it?’”

Further, in the absence of any regulatory or accreditation standards, since 2000 the mushrooming of private educational institutes (particularly but not exclusively in urban locations) serving all levels, is of grave concern to the education community (You, 2012; McNamara, 2012). To date there has been very little research into or academic interest in this phenomenon, though where such inquiry exists it focuses exclusively on higher education. One result of an unregulated privatisation has been “credential inflation” – in the possibly exaggerated estimation of one expatriate educational advisor active in the Cambodian formal education system for nearly 20 years, “You practically have to hire someone with a Master’s degree in order to get someone who can write half-decently!” (I-P109) The Accreditation Commission of Cambodia (ACC) founded in 2003, the external quality assurance body
responsible for regulating institutes of higher education in Cambodia, is supervised by the
Office of the Council of Ministers and by all accounts is a largely political rather than technical
group with attendant inaction.

And finally, chronic unemployment and underemployment, and annually growing
numbers of out-of-school youth, combined with the entry of 300,000 [variously] educated
youth into the workforce each year (UN Country Team Cambodia, 2009), is forcing the
government to re-think its overall education strategy. Two different Department Directors
reported that the Ministry will soon adopt a new emphasis on vocational and technical training
in the national system (I-A5; I-A7). This is being supported by big business (Bata is reportedly
in process of building a Technical High School in Kampong Thom), royalty (the Thai Queen
and Cambodia’s former king Sihanouk are reportedly going to jointly sponsor two additional
Technical High Schools), as well as regional bilateral donors Japan and South Korea who are
supporting curriculum development for the new technical/vocational track. The idea is that
eventually 40 percent of students will follow the technical/vocational track while 60 percent
will follow the general education stream (I-A5). Liberal philosophical contentions about
differing education streams notwithstanding, these efforts may well be too little too late, in
light of the pending ASEAN integration which will enable workers from the ten member
countries to move and work freely in the region. It is unlikely that Cambodians will be able to
compete favourably with citizens from Singapore, Malaysia, or the Philippines – nations with
much stronger national educational programming, including national economic commitment to
education.
A system in (chronic) crisis

It is clear that the Cambodian nation, as well as its education system, has been deeply marked by a series of distinct socio-political and cultural aims through a tumultuous history. It is also clear that the education system is in crisis (Ayers, 2003). Despite massive amounts of aid and “cutting edge” rhetoric, results as measured by primary school student achievement are poor (Marshall et al., 2009).

There are several common explanations for the crisis of education in Cambodia today. Ayers (2003) cites three: a discourse of destruction (that lays blame almost exclusively with the Pol Pot regime), lack of Western assistance during the Vietnamese-backed socialist decade, and subsequently, attempts to overcome an entrenched socialist past. A fourth frequent scapegoat is the French colonial regime, blamed for failure to establish a relevant, egalitarian, and widespread system of education during their ninety years of control. And a fifth and recent addition to the conversation is increasingly visible tension around the mis-match between Western, hegemonic educational forms and Khmer/Cambodian culture, values, and rural orientation (Pearson, 2011; Reyes, 2009; Tan, 2007).

Each of these varied ways of understanding the problem/s contributes to the whole picture, but as Ayers (2003) and other scholars contend, a fundamental problem appear to be inherent within Cambodian (socio-political) culture (Chandler, 2008; McNamara, 1999a, 1999b; Pak et al, 2007; Pearson, 2011). Resulting and on-going tensions in Cambodian education are apparent: there remain deep divides between tradition and modernity, urban and rural priorities, academic and vocational training. The question of culture, and its influence on formal education and educational systems, is taken up in the next chapter.
Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed how the nation’s turbulent history has directly impacted Cambodia’s education system. Though political stability, infrastructure development, and economic growth have characterised the state for the past decade, unfortunately the convergence of unfavourable political, socio-cultural, and economic variables continues to hamper ability to offer Cambodian children good quality mass public education. Despite having almost achieved globally-initiated national access goals, a significant number of children (disproportionately comprised of girls, the very poor, and indigenous ethnic minorities) remain out of school. Those who do attend don’t necessarily acquire even basic literacy or other relevant life skills.

International aid for education, delivered by multiple donors with unique agendas, has had an uneven impact on the form and quality of basic education. Central education authorities express frustration at the difficulty of understanding and managing competing priorities and philosophies. The result is, by and large, local educators who conduct classes that are more traditional (“chalk and talk,” recitation-oriented) than contemporary (student-centred, inquiry-based) in form.

The chapter ends by identifying eight current challenges confronting educators in Cambodia today. Those challenges include: heavy donor financing of public education, growing economic inequality, differential quality in urban and rural schooling, and the growth of a public-private hybridised education system that has direct implications for access and equality. Further, persistent barriers to female access to education limit women’s ability to gain employment and formal leadership. Three additional issues complicating the education environment are corruption (endemic at all levels in the education system), lack of regulatory
and accreditation standards leading to credential inflation, and chronic un(der)employment and annual entry of 300,000 [variously] educated youth into the workforce. Taken together, these historical and contemporary factors represent a formidable canvas upon which to sketch an appropriate, relevant, and equitable mass public education system.
CHAPTER FIVE: CULTURE AND EDUCATION

Understanding how LICs like Cambodia answer the questions of “why,” “how,” and “for whom” education certainly requires acknowledging the presence of extra-national “imposing” influence. But it also demands equally serious consideration of factors on the “receiving end.” An historically grounded analysis of the political, economic, institutional, social, and cultural realities that comprise a particular educational setting is imperative. Too often the cultural element is not only ignored, it is actively disregarded – or, at the other extreme, it is considered sacrosanct and unassailable. Neither is a sufficiently constructive response. Analytical description can only be achieved by identifying the ways in which informal global influences such as computerisation or the popularity of the English language, as well as formal globalised influences (such as UN campaigns and donor accountability requirements) as filtered through and expressed in terms of “international development”, converge and are mediated through (in the Cambodia case) a “Khmer perspective” to result in the educational enterprise in Cambodia; that is, the outworking of a particular educational philosophy, pedagogical inclinations, curriculum and scheduling choices, teacher training modalities, and so forth. Rather than being understood as a causality equation, it is more constructive to regard aspects of culture as possibly (pre)disposing Cambodians toward (particular) behaviours and attitudes about education. Additionally, policy and practice are mediated differently by individuals (not just systems) and are understood and negotiated differently at the national than the local level.

This section begins by briefly discussing the meta-concept of culture and specifically, the potential of its application to education, before looking at ancient historical influences that have contributed to development of a unique Khmer worldview. Secondly, it considers how
protracted conflict, war, and then genocide may have (and still) influenced the Khmer psyche. Then it moves on to look at how employing some heuristic devices (cultural schematics) can help in developing a rough sketch of local perspective. This sets the stage for the next section where it explores what happens when the (proposed) Khmer worldview meets formal education. This is not to assert that there is a single, monolithic “Khmer way” as there is/are multiplicity of understanding/s and expression/s; rather it is to suggest some socio-cultural tendencies which directly influence educational implementation in Cambodia.

**Applying Culture as a Concept**

Culture influences not only classroom relationships and behaviour, but also the way in which an education system overall is conceptualised and implemented. More fundamentally still, culture shapes epistemological perspectives and assumptions. For the purposes of this paper, culture is defined as “the customs, usages, traditions, habit clusters” by which a particular people can be distinguished from another; as well as a “set of control mechanisms for the governing of behaviour – plans, recipes, rules, instructions,” a particular combination of “systems of significant symbols (language, art, myth, ritual) for orientation, communication and self-control” (Geertz, 2002, pp. 25-26). In essence, culture is “the way that a people think/act,” based on their assumptions/understanding of the material and spiritual world, or “worldview”. A worldview acts as both a model of reality and a basis for action (Geertz, 1973, p. 169 cited in Hiebert, 2008, p. 29).

Exploration of how culture and education intersect must be approached carefully, because “culture” can easily be misunderstood or misapplied, and there is a tendency to present cultural dispositions as static and deterministic. In Cambodia’s case, culture is often presented as “an unchanging, conservative society where destiny is infinitely determined by its historical
context” (Ojendal & Sedara, 2005, p. 509). This is problematic for at least five reasons. First, all cultures are dynamic – and Cambodia has certainly experienced a significant number of dramatic transitions over the past half-decade and it is not always easy to discern what is “traditional” (Ebihara, Mortland & Ledgerwood, 1994). Second, allowance must be made for the possibility of agency expressed on an individual and/or group basis. Third, in a situation where a cultural group has been extensively and intensely traumatised, it is probable that scholars impose social structures and historical precedents which previously applied but are now obsolete. Fourth, again appealing to the destructive influence of war, Fergusson and Le Masson (1997) point out that historians in Cambodia face particular challenges – in addition to the dearth of documentation resulting from “political turmoil, wanton destruction, and neglect” (p. 91), statistical, historical and textual data “are often unreliable” for one of three reasons: they are incorrect, they are exaggerated, they are blurred (p. 92). It is difficult to know with certainty what the situation was in a particular period. And finally, Cambodia’s tragic history (Chandler, 1996), combined with the speed of technology and communication, and social evolution in the surrounding region, has produced a profound cultural ambivalence (Arensen, 2007; Gourley, 2009; O’Leary & Nee, 2001). It is quite possible that the traditional perspectives lamented especially by older generations, are so idealised as to be mis-remembered and a mis-representation, or no longer exist as viable (or desirable) options (Poethig, 2002; Zucker, 2006).

These caveats notwithstanding, it is possible to sketch a set of general Khmer cultural traits and dispositions. The overall contours of Khmer social and political organisation are consistently depicted in the literature (Ayers, 2003; Chandler, 2008; Gorman, 1999; Mabbett & Chandler, 1995; Martin, 1994; Pak et al., 2007; Thion, 1999). Recurring features of the
political culture of Cambodia include social hierarchies, relational rigidity, patriarchal dominance, peasant docility, intentional exercise of power, distance between state and people, lack of trust, and social fragmentation (Ojendal & Sedara, 2006, p.509). Organisational structures and processes, following suit, tend to be top-down and authoritarian, though there is gradual public espousal of democratic and participatory ideals.

Apart from political analyses and also with the exception of studies focusing on Khmer gender issues and relations, there are few detailed explorations about the socio-cultural and psychological elements of the Khmer worldview. Notable exceptions are Bit’s (1991) Warrior Heritage: a psychological perspective of Cambodian trauma, Peang-meth’s (1991) article Understanding the Khmer: sociological cultural observations, Ponchaud (1996) who weaves personal observation of “Khmer culture” throughout his writings, and Hinton (2005) who explores the Cambodian psyche in an effort to understand how and why the genocide occurred. More recently there have been some focused exploration/s of how Khmer values intersect with Western development concepts and practices (Arensen, 2007; O’Leary, 2006; Pearson, 2005). Where such reference is made, it is commonly applied in a descriptive manner rather than in an explanatory fashion to particular sectors, such as education. Combined with (and partially ensuing from) historical and political influences, Khmer socio-cultural dispositions (read: culture) will directly influence all aspects of education, as demonstrated in this research.23

Historical Socio-cultural Influences: A Unique Worldview

Cambodia is historically a place of contradictions and extremes. This is neatly summarised by Peang-Meth (1991) as follows: “The Khmer have a 2,000-year history

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23 The researcher acknowledges that this chapter could possibly be construed as “orientalising” because it relies primarily on Western literature for outlining the contours of Cambodian culture and education. To address this, it is anticipated that future publications eventuating from this research will draw more substantially on primary data to “speak back” to these Western constructs.
distinguished by greatness, territorial expansion, and decline to near extinction” (p. 442).

“Greatness” refers to the 600-year Angkorian period (~802 - 1431), the most visible artefact of which is the city-temple Angkor Wat, and the legacy of which continues to inform Cambodian sentiments and political behaviour (Norindr, 2006). “Territorial expansion” suggests a certain fluidity of borders; indeed, at various times during this period, Cambodia “was the mightiest kingdom in Southeast Asia, drawing visitors and tribute from as far away as present-day Burma and Malaysia as well as from what were later to be the Thai kingdoms to the west” (Chandler, 2008, p. 35). Prior to this, present-day Cambodia was (likely) part of an ancient Chinese kingdom known as Funan (Chandler, 2008, p. 20; Tully, 2002). At the close of this period, marked by moving the capital city to its current location (Phnom Penh), the mighty kingdom fragmented into a myriad of tiny fractious chiefdoms that were caught between the proverbial tiger (Siam) and crocodile (Vietnam) (Tully, 2002). Then during three centuries that are referred to by historians as the “Dark Ages” (17\textsuperscript{th}, 18\textsuperscript{th}, 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries), Cambodia very nearly disappeared as its land were invaded and annexed repeatedly by Thailand and Vietnam (Heder & Ledgerwood, 1996; Mabbett & Chandler, 1995). By some accounts, the complete obliteration of the nation-state of Cambodia may have been prevented by French colonisation in the mid-19\textsuperscript{th} century (Martin, 1994; Tully, 2002). Paradoxically, Angkor Wat, “discovered,” popularised, and preserved by the French early in their colonial venture into Indochina, has become symbolic of the ancient Khmer historic legacy of regional domination. A “mythology of ancient greatness” still echoes in public discourse, most frequently in animosity toward the neighbouring Vietnamese; and most recently, used to explain the Prey Vihear border conflagration with neighbouring Thailand. This tension between former greatness and current
poverty remains influential at policy level, and is evident in government rhetoric about national identity and development priorities, and in popular media.

Scholars articulating the Khmer worldview demonstrate that it has been influenced by three distinct philosophical-religious streams that converged to form a particular cosmology: traditional animism, Hinduism/Brahmanism, and Theravada Buddhism. Chandler (2008, p. 25) notes that Cambodia is infamous among historians for its syncretism [the fusion of differing beliefs, ideas, models], and Bit (1991) notes the Khmer ability to hold together conflicting ideals and values. Traditionally the Khmer have been an agrarian people, and strongly animistic, combining astrology, magic, sorcery, and talismanism in an effort to access the spiritual world (Bit, 1991). Chandler (2008) speculates that this combination may be the reason for the peoples’ characterisation as “timeless” by historians, scholars, and popular media (see also Ollier & Winter, 2006). Though ostensibly complex and comprehensive in the practical outworking, the purpose of combining these various elements is simple: tattoos, amulets, and sacrifices were employed in an effort to appease and control the spirits that directly influenced life, (agriculture), and death. A neak ta, or guardian spirit of the place, featured largely in this traditional setting as one who could grant protection (from malevolent forces) and ensure success (Mabbett & Chandler, 1995; Peang-Meth, 1991).

The so-called “Indianisation” of Cambodia seems to have occurred gradually rather than through violent or contested imposition (Chandler, 2008; I. Harris, 2005; Marston & Guthrie, 2004), suggesting a degree of pre-existing cultural affinity. The influence was deep and wide.

During the first five hundred years or so of the current era, India provided Cambodia with a writing system, a pantheon, meters of poetry, a language (Sanskrit) to write it in, a vocabulary of social hierarchies…Buddhism, the idea
of universal kingship, and new ways of looking at politics, sociology, architecture, iconography, astronomy and aesthetics. (Chandler, 2008, p. 17)

The Hindu-Brahmanic cult of the divine god-king (devaraja) infused and gradually came to define Khmer polity (~800 AD) (Chandler, 2008). This cult depicts life as a pyramid, topped by a god-king functioning as an intermediary between the divine realm and mortal humanity. This all-powerful king is supported by a highly stratified structure of people delineated in terms of class, status, rank, and role (Bit, 1991; Peang-Meth, 1991). The role of the king is to protect; the role of the people is to be protected and to contribute allegiance. The resulting “caste-like system in which conspicuous deference is shown to one’s ‘betters’ persists as social behaviour among Khmer…” (Peang-Meth, 1991, p. 446). In fact, Chandler (2008, p. 29) notes that there were 14 categories for slave in pre-Angkorian Cambodia. This version of ideal moral and social order also contributed to the concept of helplessness of peasant masses to change their own destiny and gave rise to “unchallenged personal and aristocratic cults in Cambodian society,” a fixation with personal power that has distinguished much of Cambodian political history (Bit, 1991, p. 9; Chandler, 2008).

Theravada Buddhism, widely adopted around 1200 AD under the aegis of King Jayavarman VII, contributed the influential concepts of individual salvation through personal effort, reincarnation, and karma (Bit, 1991; Mabbett & Chandler, 1995). In many ways, then, it served to solidify the existing social and political order: for instance, Buddhism’s conception of political authority assumed that man’s imperfect nature necessarily required a king for ensuring social order (I. Harris, 1999). Furthermore, power and ability were regarded as rewards for a previously virtuous life (and therefore incontestable) and through merit-making activities (prescribed as contributions to religious events, not necessarily in terms of assisting other human beings) one could possibly improve one’s status in a future life. Where the
Brahmanic influence catered to the elite, Buddhism was more democratic in its prescription for developing moral character and in its explanation of human life as essentially social, a set of interlocking and reciprocal relationships (Ayers, 2003; Bit, 1991; I. Harris, 1999, 2005; Marston & Guthrie, 2004; Martin, 1994).

Ayers (2003, p. 11-12) highlights three central features of the pre-colonial political-religious milieu which remain strongly influential in contemporary Cambodian social structure, all of which have a direct bearing on the nation’s education system. First, a complex web of patronage and clientship constituted a fiercely hierarchical social system; second, there has traditionally been no notion of mutual obligation between patrons and clients (“while those at the top governed, those at the bottom existed to be governed”), contributing to a view of power as its own end rather than a means for improving the lives of clients; and third, this system was largely maintained through the teaching of local Buddhist monks. Picking up on these threads, Pak et al. (2007) define the current version of Cambodia’s socio-political system as neo-patrimonialism, a “form of governance that uses formal bureaucratic institutions to gain power, wealth, and legitimacy of leaders” (p. 57). The “neo” aspect of a patrimonial system comes through blending of two forms of power: “informal patrimonial power based on traditional patron-client power dynamics and formal bureaucratic power steeped in legal-rational bureaucratic power” (p. 57).

Thus, various aspects of a Khmer worldview have a direct bearing on education. Some of the more obvious include a Brahmanic/Buddhist ethno-cultural perspective and a strong neo-patrimonial inclination, both of which downplay the possibility of individual agency. Cambodia’s intensely hierarchical social structure resembles the Indian caste system both in form and function (Bit, 1991; Chandler, 2008), discouraging individual initiative, inquiry, and
authentic democratic dialogue. A limited culture of schooling and association between education and religion converge to promote respect for the position of teacher, the idea of school as a major site of moral inculcation, and an emphasis on the stated word, recitation, and repetition. As a final example, the historically weak tradition of “civil society” and focus on the extended family as primary referent constrain community participation and facilitate corruption (Ayers, 2003; Chandler, 2008; Pak et al., 2007).

**A Legacy of Conflict: The Impact of Conflict on Identity**

For most of the time since its independence from France in 1953, Cambodia has been embroiled in either internecine political conflict or all-out war. Officially the most recent “war” culminated in the disastrous UNTAC mission (1991-1993) that failed to deliver peace or democracy (Curtis, 1993). The effects of war continue to reverberate through all aspects of society. Visible results of past conflict/s include disputes over property rights, landmines which still main/kill one person every day, a disproportionate number of female-headed households, a bloated military apparatus, shifting political systems and services, a pervasive lack of trust, and tendency toward violent resolution of conflict (Chandler, 2008; Hinton, 2005; Slocomb, 2006).

**Genocide**

Genocide is regarded as a separate element because of the far-reaching nature of its psychological, social, and education-specific effects (Boyden & Gibbs, 1997). The impact of genocide on national demographics is clearly visible in the proportion of children under 15 and the preponderance of female-headed households. Psychological impacts are in many ways experienced on a very individual basis; however it is also possible to see the results on a
general social level such as the prevailing short-term vs. long-term perspective that makes it difficult for a particular generation to plan/think about the future. Results are also visible at the national level, a general lack of trust being one example. One practical consequence of the Pol Pot era was a sharp decline in literacy levels and educational attainment, and a decimated teacher corps, resulting from a four-year period of virtually no formal education, as well as systematic slaughter of “professionals” by the Khmer Rouge.

**Impact of trauma**

Though frequently acknowledged to exist, and to be of potential concern, there is little Cambodia-specific research about the influence of trauma, either on survivors (of years of protracted conflict including genocide) or on subsequent generations. Most related research has been done among refugee populations in the Thai border camps and among re-settled populations in the United States. Levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) were very high in the refugee camps and higher for Khmer Cambodians than any other ethnic groups; and for Cambodian survivors relocated to third countries (R.Y. Kim, 2005). Thus, it remains a “common sense” assumption (assertion) that personal and family trauma likely impacts a child’s ability to learn and adapt to a school setting; but it is unclear how “sequential trauma” affects academic achievement and how the general ethos of violence and poverty might affect schooling. It has been demonstrated that Cambodian children are less optimistic about their future than any other children in the region (UNICEF, 2001).

The only study about trauma and academic achievement in Cambodia to date showed no correlation between caregiver trauma and child’s academic achievement (Eng, Mulsow, Cleveland & Hart, 2009). Rather, adolescent academic achievement was predicted by a caregiver’s brain-related trauma, child gender (girls performed better than boys), hours taking
extra classes, and father’s education. It was unfortunate that the study did not consider the
confounding variables of fee-paying or corruption, which have both been shown to strongly
correlate with academic success in Cambodia.

Pearson (2011) cautions that acknowledging individual trauma is insufficient, and that
the psychology of large-group violence and societal trauma must also be recognised because it
“creates an inability to resolve powerful emotions that often leads to individual antisocial
behaviour, such as domestic violence, rape, and the inability to care for children properly,”
things previously unimaginable on the scale that they now occur (p. 33). These new
behavioural norms eventually become embedded and transferred to successive generations and
are thereby normalised.

Furthermore, it is vital to expand awareness of the cause(s) of individual and collective
trauma beyond the Khmer Rouge era, the so-called “discourse of destruction” (Ayers, 1999;
Duggan, 1997) as this fails to recognise widespread trauma inherent in a society characterised
by chronic low-grade violence condoned by a strict socio-economic hierarchy (Edwards,
2008), the life-threatening and hindering impact of poverty, and a pervasive sense of fatalism
which inhibits constructive response (Ketchum & Ketchum, 2008; Miles, 2008). Yet, while an
understanding of Cambodian history and perhaps especially recent history is critical for
understanding the contemporary social geography of this nation, it is disingenuous to attribute
limitless fault to the conventional and convenient scapegoats of “Pol Pot” and “poverty.”

**National identity as a question mark**

A less visible result of Pol Pot’s ruinous socio-political experiment is the blurring of a
sense of national identity for the Khmer (Arensén, 2007). In combination with the speed of
technological and social evolution in neighbouring countries, this has created a profound
cultural ambivalence (O’Leary, 2001; Gourley, 2009). Thus it is possible that truly traditional perspectives no longer exist, that “ideal types” may not emerge, or that what emerges might be so idealised as to actually be a mis-representation of reality (Poethig, 2002). This tension between tradition and modernity in Cambodia and for Cambodians is the topic of a growing body of research.

Like all cultures and societies, Cambodia is dynamic, and it has been noted that Cambodians seem particularly resilient and adept at taking change in stride; however the winds of change seem to be blowing with extra intensity during this modern era (Ebihara, Mortland & Ledgerwood, 1994; Winter & Ollier, 2006; Chandler, 1996). Cultural tension is intensified by the unprecedented numbers of Cambodians living outside the country who are immersed in non-Khmer cultures and bring those “foreign ideas” back to Cambodia on temporary or permanent return; and by global economic patterns that have exacerbated rural poverty and projected Cambodia as a source of low-wage labour (Derks, 2008; Mortland, 2002). Ojendal & Sedara (2006) suggest that the presence of many Western non-governmental development agencies is one significant change factor and that its relentless discourse around human rights and egalitarian participation is expanding potential domains of influence, thereby breaking down the traditional hierarchical ordering. Most Cambodia-watchers are not as optimistic: while the rules of patronage may be changing, patronage as a rule seems as solid an organising structure as ever (Ledgerwood & Vijghen, 2002; Pak et al., 2007).

The diagram below (Figure 3) represents major components of the current Cambodian socio-cultural milieu through which any exogenous ideas or influences must pass in order to impact the educational enterprise. Influence will be negotiated differently at national level (in...
the form of policy) and local level (in the form of implementation). There may also be some difference in negotiation patterns based on an individual’s particular history.

**Figure 3: Major components of socio-cultural milieu in Cambodia**

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**Gender Reality vs. Gender Rhetoric**

*Khmer women on the move* (Derks, 2008) is a very apt description of gender relations in contemporary Cambodia as it alludes to physical and metaphorical shifting, as well as the dynamism of individual and national perspectives on social mores. “According to the situation, [women] actively use codes of proper behaviour and local concepts, not only in a sense of complying with a given social order, but also to their advantage, while pursuing their needs and desires…” (2008, p. 206). Indeed, Cambodian women also have a reputation for being more powerful, and gender relations more equitable, than is the situation for women in other Southeast Asian countries because (theoretically) Cambodian women control the family
money and also are very visibly active in the (informal) economic sphere. However, gender relations are not as genteel as they appear on the surface. One clear indicator of the actual vs. theoretical situation for women in Cambodia is persistent gender-based violence of epidemic proportion, as highlighted in recent reports (Amnesty International’s 2010 *Breaking the silence: sexual violence in Cambodia*; Human Rights Watch’s 2010 *Off the Streets: arbitrary detention and other abuses against sex workers in Cambodia*; UNICEF’s 2007 *Sound the alarm: Reporting violence against children in Cambodia*). Indeed, social acceptance, and the prevalence and severity of domestic violence, is one very clear indicator of the low status of women. For discussion, see Surtees (2003), Ketchum and Ketchum (2008), and Gorman (1999). Men and boys are valued more highly than women and girls in Khmer culture. The male/female sexual (and general) double-standard is clearly espoused in the popular proverb: *men are like gold, so if “soiled” they can be wiped clean; however, women are like white cloth and once “soiled” the mark will forever be visible.* The ancient *Chhap Srey* (literally: women’s law), explained in more detail below, remains an informal but powerful influence on attitudes about women (Kasumi, 2006; LICADO, 2007; Lee, 2007).

Further, Cambodia’s score/s against three global measures of “gender equity,” namely the Gender Inequality Index (GII), Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), also demonstrate the actual, against theoretical, situation for women vis-à-vis men in Cambodia. GEM scores reflect gender inequalities between men and women in terms of seats held in parliament; female proportion of legislators, senior officials and managers; proportion of technical and professional workers; and ratio of estimated female to male income. For GDI, gender disparities in adult literacy, gross enrolment ratios in schools, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels, and income disparities all contribute
to Cambodia’s low GDI ranking (NWEC, 2010). As both the GDI and GEM are extensions of the UN’s Human Development Index (HDI), and cannot be understood independently of the HDI, it is important to note that in 2011, Cambodia’s HDI score was 139/187 (up two places from the previous year). The same year, Cambodia has a GII rank of 99th (with a score of .5). In 2007-2008, Cambodia merited a GDI score just less than 0.6 and a GEM score of just under 0.4 (lower than almost any other nation in the region).

In other words, the current situation is not favourable for women, but it is not static either, showing some incremental improvements against global indicators. Overall, it can be said that the status of women in Cambodia remains contentious and women pay a high price for simply being female. One of the oldest human rights organisations in Cambodia explains:

> Women in Cambodia face numerous challenges and dangers, including gross human rights violations. Many of these problems are related to the different values assigned to men and women in Cambodian society. Men occupy positions of importance and power and are not censured for their frequent use of violence within the family. The lower social status of women, on the other hand, means that many are treated as mere possessions or objects, and are denied their rights and full participation in society. (Walsh, 2007, p. 3)

O’Leary (2001) notes in her study of Khmer development workers’ understanding of Western development values, that only gender (of all Western values discussed) was “widely regarded as being ‘against’ Cambodian culture and tradition” (p. vii). Current social norms are rooted in historical norms and gendered practices, and reinforced by those in positions of authority in the current power structure, as the next section describes.

**Traditional views of women and girls**

The term “traditional” is, at the best of time, problematic – but in Cambodia this is compounded by the prolonged social upheaval and civil conflict the nation has experienced, not just in recent decades; but the nation’s history is a very turbulent tale of conflict with
neighbouring Vietnam and Thailand, and complicated internecine conflict. In contemporary Cambodia, then, Cambodians frequently appeal to “tradition” or “the way it used to be” simply by saying “a previous time” (*pale moon* or *pi moon*: literally, time before or since before). The actual historic period, or specific behaviour, to which they appeal, is not consistent. What is consistent, is the appeal to an idealised behavioural norm for females which serves to subordinate them to males and saddles women with responsibility for maintaining family reputation and honour at all costs.

This code is embodied most clearly and comprehensively, though not exclusively in the “Chbap Srey” (Women’s Law), an ancient orally transmitted poem composed in the 14th – 17th century and set down in writing in the 19th century. In summary,:

These female codes stress that, regardless of what happens in the home, only complete and utter obedience and servitude towards the husband will ensure the good reputation of the family. The *Chbap Srey* also refers to appropriate conduct, appearance, and comportment required of a woman” [such as walking softly and speaking and laughing quietly so as not to draw attention to herself]. (Hoefinger, 2010, p. 32)

The notion of appropriate deportment for females is also strongly reinforced by Khmer literature, education, public media, and high-level government diatribes “aimed at the female form; and injurious foreign influence” (Edwards, 2008, p. 214; see also Kasumi, 2006 and Walsh, 2007). Edwards offers a reason for why there is such ardent, wide-spread appeal to traditional mores for women:

When women transgress the moral codes enshrined in such cultural canons as the *Chbap Srey*...they are not just violating a social code. They are themselves, as gatekeepers between the wild and the civilized, opening society up to moral rot. The notion of women as gate-keepers of the moral and biological health of the race and nation has had much currency in Asia, Europe, and the Americas. Invested as icons, guardians and boundary-markers of national identity, women’s bodies are routinely held up by state actors as embodiments of national sovereignty. (Edwards, 2008, p. 232)
For the Khmer there appear to be particular challenges in the consideration of gender and changes to the current constructs governing gender relations, resulting from immense social upheaval and ensuing issues of national identity. Attempting to explain national resistance to passage of a *Law on Violence Against Women and Children*, Hill and Ly (2004) suggest:

Resistance to the legislation is evidence of long-standing anxieties that recognition of women’s rights will destabilise the gender roles and relationships” thereby de-stabilising society at large. At the same time, there is a “characteristic Cambodian desire for order and a desperate hope that legislation [laws and legal mechanisms about personal behaviour more generally] will re-establish robab rap roy (the way things are properly arranged) in the wilderness of a highly traumatised, post-conflict society, now exposed to a rapidly modernising world. (p. 109)

**Current status of women**

In documents ostensibly intended to promote the well-being of women, the RGC continues to proclaim that “women are the backbone of society and the economy,” perhaps unwittingly offering explanation as well as justification for the current status of women in Cambodia. This phrase was first used by the Prime Minister in the first Rectangular Strategy (2004) and subsequently picked up by MoWA in its *Neary Rattanak* document/s (1999, 2003, 2009a). It is now a very familiar refrain in political discourse about gender in Cambodia. But it belies a seemingly intransigent reality.

Despite some changes, the disparity between women and men is still patently obvious in examining certain indicators such as health, literacy, political participation and access to economic resources. Gender equality remains a challenge in Cambodia….The recognition of rights and freedoms contained in the constitution and other legal and relevant entities is not benefiting women as intended. This is due [in part] to the observance of [traditional/archaic] moral codes and social practices (*Chhap Srey*) that regulate the female population. (NGO-CEDAW & CAMBOW, 2011, p. 2, 3)
Implications for schooling

Strongly held societal attitudes about females influence all facets of life, not least influencing formal education as experienced by both boys and girls (Velasco, 2001). So while the Cambodian constitution renders women and men equal before the law, and especially the education sector has made significant effort to reduce male-biased gender disparity, still – a myriad of strongly-held cultural and religiously-reinforced beliefs about the inferiority of females, and the (domestic) roles that girls/women are expected to fulfil, have a direct impact on whether or not girls even get to school. These conditions partially explain why the ratio of females to males diminishes as education levels increase (Bredenberg, Lon & Ma, 2003; Chansopheak, 2009; Gorman, 1999; Velasco, 2001).

In very practical terms, girls bear a disproportionate responsibility for domestic chores such as child-minding and cooking; in the event of limited resources boys are preferred for formal education because they are thought to be more intelligent and of more value than girls (CARE-MoEYS, 1998; Fiske, 1995). Reportedly, the ways that Cambodian male teachers treat female students reflects this belief in the intellectual and physical inferiority of girls, and has also been shown to have a negative influence on female participation (Gorman, 1999; Velasco, 2001). Furthermore, it is still common in rural areas for parents to express reluctance to allow girls to attend school because girls are too physically weak to walk long distances; and worse, they will learn to write love letters and (as a result) lose their virginity (CARE-MoEYS, 1998; Smith-Heffner, 1993; Velasco, 2001). Of course there are also practical limitations to participation: personal security enroute to schools (which in rural areas are often quite far from homes) and a lack of toilet facilities are additional barriers to education for girls (Bredenberg, Lon & Ma, 2003). These obstacles for female participation as students, have an obvious
domino effect for numbers of female teachers, administrators, and principals in the education system overall.

**Cambodia Through the Lens of “Universal Culture Schematics”**

In addition to looking at unique cultural factors there is value in analysing Cambodia from the vantage point of more general cultural constructs. These constructs must be recognised as simply heuristic devices, as a potential window into a complex social setting. The intention is not to suggest that Cambodia is a cultural monolith (that is - all Cambodians will respond in predetermined ways), nor to assume that culture is static. Rather, the purpose of employing these devices is to aid understanding of a complex and dynamic reality.

**Orality as a way of being**

It is helpful in discussion of education, to recognise that Cambodia operates largely as an oral culture. Ong (1982) notes that oral and literate societies differ fundamentally in the way they generate, manage, and transmit information and knowledge. The prioritisation of sound (oral cultures) or vision (literate cultures) determines not just how communication occurs, but how the very world is conceptualised. Oral societies are “usually highly immediate, personal, and relational” and spoken words are very powerful (Hiebert, 2008, p. 24). This differs dramatically from literate societies where physical proximity is less necessary and less important, and where power rests more in the printed than uttered word. In literate societies, argumentation runs in linear and rational manner but in oral societies it is less direct and more relationally-oriented. In the former, people can be very detached from time and space (abstract); conversely, oral cultures are more directly linked to local context (concrete).
Though gradually changing, Cambodia still functions largely as an oral society and such an orientation has a direct bearing on both conceptualisation and implementation of education.

This is visible (audible?) at several sites. For instance, a storied response to questions is more common than a straightforward answer. A second example is the frequently observed antiphonal call and response phenomenon between teachers and students in classrooms, which is also easily assumed at public gatherings and training events. For many Cambodians, written documents are not an automatic or primary source of information; rather, the words of elders or conversation generally is more likely to be sought and referenced. And, a final example is the frequency of lengthy orations by politicians.24

**Hiebert’s worldview frame**

A second useful schematic is Hiebert’s (1997; 2008) basic worldview framework which posits that worldviews differ from each other on three planes: existential assumptions (fundamental cognitive structures for explaining ultimate reality – includes view of time as linear or cyclical), affective assumptions (sense of beauty and style – for instance, forms of Buddhism equate life with suffering) and evaluative assumptions (relating to morality, used to make determination between right and wrong). Worldviews differ from one another on a core of fundamental characteristics of ideas, feelings, and values. Those characteristics include category formation, signs (the relationship of categories to reality), logic (abstract/algorhithmic, analogical, topological, relational, wisdom), attribution of causality, epistemology. Every worldview has varying assumptions and expectations about teaching, learning, education, and human development which it considers ‘normative’. As Hiebert notes, “people do not live in the same world with different labels attached to it, but in radically different perceptual worlds”

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24 Witness the Prime Minister’s 5 hr., 20 minute speech to Parliament on the 8th of August, 2012.
(2002, p. 13). For instance, a strong sense of hierarchy and limited good are characteristic of peasant societies; modern societies are more egalitarian – with obvious implications for the educational process and systems. It is beyond the scope of this research to attempt to delineate a Cambodian worldview – however, what is important to note is that Khmer views of the teaching and learning process differ not simply in form, but at a more fundamental level and this difference must be carefully considered when devising (importing, adapting) international pedagogical standards and practices if “quality education” that makes sense in the local context is to result.

Values orientation: Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner

A less overtly meta-physical schematic also relevant to the discussion of globalised education is the model developed by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, and published as *Riding the Waves of Culture* (1997) to help explain national cultural differences in business organisations (cited in Nguyen, 2009). It is loosely based on Hofstede’s pioneering work (described below). They identified seven value orientations as follows, suggesting that different cultures have distinct preferences for one of each pair: 1) *Universalism* – *Particularism* (rules vs. relationships); 2) *Collectivism* – *Individualism* (affect-based trust vs. cognition-based trust); 3) Neutral – Emotional (detached vs. emotional relational interaction); 4) *Diffuse* - *Specific* cultures (values social harmony vs. direct expression); 5) *Achievement* – *Ascription* (accords status on the basis of what is done vs. who one is); 6) *Attitude to time* (prioritising relationships and experiential rhythm vs. instrumental prioritisation of tasks); and 7) *Attitude to the environment* (adapt to natural environment vs. control external environment). Nguyen and colleagues have applied the first six of these to the study of collective learning (CL) in an eastern/Asian (Hong Kong, Vietnam) vs. Western/European (Netherlands) context.
and convincingly demonstrate that the eastern/Asian tendency toward particularism, 
collectivism, emotional interaction, diffuse expression, ascription, and intertwining socio-
emotional activity with instrumental tasks (Nguyen, Terlouw, Pilot & Elliott 2009) requires 
that CL be adjusted to be culturally appropriate for that non-Western culture. In other words, 
CL applied in a Western context and an Eastern context will look different, though 
fundamental assumptions of the approach remain intact. The “eastern profile” identified by 
Nguyen and colleagues readily applies to the Cambodia context.

**Applying Hofstede’s 5-dimensional model of cultural difference**

Hofstede’s (1986) 5-dimensional (5-D) model of cultural difference, developed 
specifically to assess variations in teaching and learning styles, provides another conceptual 
framework from which to derive understanding of the educational project in Cambodia. 
Berkvens’s (2009) application of Hofstede’s model to Cambodia incorporated data from a 
1994 survey (Harmer, 1995 as cited in Berkvens, 2009) with primary data collected in 2008 in 
an effort to arrive at a more ‘complete’ picture. Accordingly, Berkvens (2009, p. 45-51) 
classifies Cambodia as having the following orientation. Cambodia is collectivist but with a 
smaller in-group than other Asian countries. Individualist cultures regard personal interest and 
immediate/nuclear family as primary. These societies are loosely integrated. Collectivist 
societies incorporate larger groups of related/interrelated people into their ‘in-group’; they tend 
to exhibit tightly integrated social cohesion. Cambodians give primary attention to nuclear 
family and have less regard for people in the out-group, and the out-group is larger now than 
before the genocide. Cambodian society, outside the family network, is loosely integrated. 
Cambodians are generally very tolerant, at least not overtly critical, of power differentials, 
accepting them as normative. This power differential dimension reflects the extent to which
less powerful people accept unequal power relations as normal. Greater “power distance” refers to a situation where more people regard unequal power as normative.

In Cambodia, power tends to be concentrated at the highest levels; organisationally, loyalty (and seniority) rather than aptitude is criteria for advancement. Berkven’s findings echo the earlier study in demonstrating that Cambodians act with high uncertainty avoidance; that is, they experience anxiety about unstructured and unpredictable situations as well as a tendency to adhere to strict behavioural codes and beliefs in absolute truth/s as a means of countering uncertainty. While classifying Cambodia as “a slightly feminine society,” concomitantly Berkvens found that masculine characteristics (such as violence and speed) were frequently demonstrated by powerful people (for further discussion, see Ketchum & Ketchum, 2008). This dimension refers to tolerance for gender role differentiation. For both types, males dominate politics and organisations. Masculinist societies have greater role distinction, are characterised by competitiveness, and respect power, strength, and speed, and learners tend to overrate performance in self-assessment. Berkvens also found that over-estimation of personal capacity (by men and women) was very common. Finally, along Hofstede’s fifth dimension, Berkvens found Cambodians to demonstrate a short-term orientation, preferring not to think about or plan for the medium to long-term future. While this could, of course, be attributable to a recent history of war and social upheaval, it could also be explained in more ancient terms, as by Tully (2002, p. 51): “For Khmer peasants…‘contentment is wealth’. The purpose of life is not the accumulation of material goods, but to live a good life which includes the renunciation of earthly desires in order to accrue merit. As historians Mabbett and Chandler (1995) record a French colonial administrator as observing, the indolence of the Cambodian
peasants could also be considered a form of wisdom, a natural response to the physical conditions confronting them (p. 14).

Cambodia’s location on these five cultural dimensions illuminates the ways in which an indigenous Cambodian educational system might be conceptualised (its purpose, outworking, etc.), as well how micro-transactions in classroom and school could be expected to function. For example, in collectivist-oriented societies individuals speak aloud only if directly called upon or in a small group; education is pursued more for prestige than for self-respect or even for the purpose of improving one’s economic value; certificates are more important than competence; and teachers are expected to act preferentially rather than impartially (Hofstede, 1986, p. 312). Students in low power-distance societies (typical of Western nations) emphasise the personal discovery of wisdom/knowledge, are expected to initiate conversation in a class (as a means of personal discovery), and are encouraged to contradict or criticise instructors (Hofstede, 1986, p. 313) – all of which are anathema in a high power context like Cambodia (Howes & Ford, 2011).

**Khmer Worldview Meets Formal Education**

The Khmer worldview affects the educational enterprise in numerous ways. For instance, affinity for hierarchy clearly dictates/orders the structure of the educational system and decision-making and implementation processes (McNamara, 1999a). Beliefs about child rearing and about gender significantly influence the quantity and quality of participation (CARE-MoEYS, 1998; Velasco, 1999); the cultural values that equate formal education with moral superiority produce a strong commitment by parents to ensure that children are educated (Smith-Heffner, 1993). Cultural values of honour/face and the premium placed on stability/harmony prescribe particular relationships (Pearson, 2005). Religious traditions strongly
influence pedagogical practices. Also, though not a specific cultural attribute, because trauma continues to impact Cambodian culture and education (Boyden & Gibbs, 1997), it is included in this discussion.

Some cultural influences are operationalised regardless of the political milieu in which education occurs, perhaps epistemological perspectives foremost (Howes & Ford, 2011). Khmer culture values collective and proven wisdom rather than individual new ideas, replication rather than originality, so it follows that the dominant Khmer concept of a good student is one who learns (and repeats) the knowledge already acquired by his or her teacher (Chandler, 1996; Ayers, 2003). As Howes & Ford (2011) note:

This understanding of learning is reflected in an understanding that a university research thesis should involve not original research but rather the reproduction of a complex procedure that achieves the same result as that previously produced by other competent researchers. This replication will duly show that the candidate has demonstrated the skills required of a competent researcher. The more complex and difficult the procedure that is reproduced and that gets an accurate result, the higher the quality of the thesis. (2011, p. 169)

Discussion of the particular interface of Khmer culture with educational practice should be preceded by noting that because of the confluence of violent events and social dislocation which has been Cambodia’s recent lot, there is among the generation currently holding leadership and management positions, (excessive) fear of cultural erosion and a hagiographic perception of the ‘golden past’ which may lead to greater rigidity in thinking and behaviour than might otherwise be (Arensen, 2007; Gourley, 2009; Ollier & Winter, 2006; Velasco, 2004).

**Political system and practices**

There are many aspects of Cambodian political practice that have a direct bearing on its education system. These include the “strong man” culture that contains a tendency toward
violent suppression of opposition (including unions), weak rule of law, poor accountability and lack of transparency from those in power, endemic corruption, low pay for civil servants, and abuse and capture of contractual arrangements by powerful patrons (Ledgerwood & Vijghen, 2000; Pak et al., 2007). Examples of how some of these characteristics are played in the structuring of the educational system are included in the following section.

**Organisational structures**

Pearson (2005) suggests that two basic precepts aptly describe the fundamentals of Cambodian social organisation, both of which have clear implications for the educational enterprise. First, social stability is predicated on unequal relations between people: the junior owes the senior respect and obedience, while the senior owes the junior protection and consideration. And second, family is the prototype of all social organisations. A person is primarily a member of a family, rather than an individual: social harmony (everyone maintaining face) is paramount:

Some of the stronger characteristics of Cambodian society stem from those beliefs. Conformity with the order of things and not challenging the status quo are very strong guides for most people’s behaviour to the extent that even asking a simple question of someone “higher” than oneself is considered by many to be beyond what is possible or socially acceptable. (Pearson, 2005, p. 3)

Additionally, Pearson notes a culturally predisposed reluctance to make changes, as this could be construed as admission that something was “wrong” and as such, would result in loss of face. Likewise, Cambodians in positions of authority may be reluctant to take responsibility because they could be held accountable for bad or negative events (which can in turn detrimentally influence one’s karma). They can also be quick to blame others for any failure as a way of saving (their own) face (Pearson, 2005; Ponchaud, 1996). Such disposition makes it
difficult to engage in active-learning (which tends to be open-ended, as it is dependent upon student interests and pre-existing knowledge and experience) and student-centred pedagogical practices (which requires dialogue and contradiction).

Many academics have identified hierarchical rules of interaction as being a barrier to education, as summarised by Pearson: “In the Cambodian context, learning can be constrained as it intersects with hierarchies of power, position, age, and gender” (Pearson, 2011, p. xii). A practical outworking of this is that it is difficult for young females to ask questions (whether they are students in a classroom or administrators in a Ministry meeting); and for teachers to question superiors even for simple points of clarification lest this be regarded as a challenge to authority.

**Perceptions on leadership**

Khmer perspectives on leadership also differ significantly from what could be called a Western model of leadership and governance. A primary role of leaders within the hierarchical organisational structures characteristic of Cambodia is to set direction and make moral pronouncements, rather than to facilitate understanding, congruence, compliance, or achievement. “The result is that Cambodian leadership is freed from the practicalities of implementation and so can easily create very moral, politically correct, idealistic goals which may not necessarily be achievable.” (Howes & Ford, 2011). Thus, where a Western worldview identifies a ‘gap’ between policy and practice, a Khmer worldview may not see the distinction in the same way.

Participation by “ordinary people” in governance has traditionally been discouraged (Pellini & Ayers, 2007). Further, allegiance is given primarily to people rather than to principles or particular values (Maskill & Garang, 1998; Peang-Meth, 1991); and inclusion is
based on relationship rather than merit. This sort of normative structure has obvious implications when applied to an educational context. Policy-makers instruct, rather than consult, administrators; corruption is rampant; teachers must be respected and not questioned (Pak et al., 2007); students are rewarded for compliance – quietly receiving and obeying instructions and repeating received knowledge but not daring cross-generational dialogue (Miles & Thomas, 2007).

Consultative interaction

As noted in Training for Transformation, change is perceived to rightfully come from the top, rather than from the initiative of ordinary staff (O’Leary & Nee, 2001, p. 86). Consultation is not a common element in the process of change. A Khmer staff member of SC-International (a prominent NGO involved with formal education) explained:

Teachers “instruct” and “order” they do not “discuss” or “consult” in Khmer culture. The older instruct and tell the younger, the strong instruct the weak. It is more efficient; and when survival is at stake why do you have to discuss? I don’t ask my child about getting water and what they think; I tell my child that unless they get water from the well we have nothing to drink so go get water! (I-A16).

This avoidance of consultative interaction translates at classroom level into teachers having difficulty exercising independent thought for teaching or managing their own classes; they do as they are told, even if they don’t understand why or even clearly what they are supposed to be doing. For example, when asked why decorate classroom walls, one teacher explained: “the book tells us we must decorate the wall [so we do].” Another indicated that he has his own reasons for decorating the walls but that “I do not know what the real purpose is.”

Pearson (2011) observes that fear and mis-trust are among the most widespread national emotions: as an indicator of this, she observes that the phrase khnyom aht hien (“I don’t dare”) is frequently used to explain in action in many different circumstances (p. 36).
Moreover, there seems to be a specific fear of questioning: “In Cambodian culture, asking questions is prohibited by fear of causing people of higher status to risk losing face if they do not know the answer” (Pearson, 2011, p. 13). And she notes that “Few Cambodians are brought up to express their curiosity through asking questions, so it is rarely valued as a feature of Cambodian thinking” (p. 135). It is difficult to see how an intrinsically democratic form of education can take root in a social context characterised by fear.

Honour/face and stability/harmony

Maintaining “face” and one’s [privileged] position is paramount in the Cambodian worldview. Pearson explains, for example, “In keeping with the Cambodia adage “know 10, teach 7,’ teachers will prevent others from achieving their level of knowledge by withholding some of what they know, thus protecting their privileged position in the community.” (2011, p. 14). Thus, the Khmer values of honour/face and stability/harmony both reflect and reinforce the social status quo. The influence of these on educational practice is momentous, and runs counter to Western notions of effective teaching and learning:

In value systems where direct communication is favoured, loss of face not feared, and a distinction made between criticism of an idea and criticism of a proponent of an idea, the process of ‘critical thinking’ is assumed to be of value. But when the traditional means of expressing disagreement is silent non-cooperation, and loss of face (and causing it) is to be avoided at all cost, then ‘critical thinking’ is often perceived as negative, impolite and unacceptable. Children are taught from an early age to respect and not question authority. (Howes & Ford, 2011, p. 170)

Shame and blame

One education NGO worker identified reluctance to take responsibility for error as a significant barrier to quality education: “Blame is a big problem in Cambodia. Blame is very strong in this country. Everyone blames someone else and no one takes responsibility.” He went on to explain that:
Blaming shows the person doing blaming as having power and authority and prestige; the one being blamed is little and ashamed. But, if we blame that does not help to find out ‘why’ something is not working! We need to ask why it’s not working so we can find a solution!” (I-A16).

Indeed, at Sala Phum teachers blamed students for not paying attention and the Director for being a weak manager; the Director blamed teachers for being lazy and having bad attitudes; community is blamed for failure to raise sufficient money for facilities; MoEYS blamed teachers for being inadequate; provincial administrators blamed school administrators for “misunderstanding” central dictates.

Focus on appearance

In addition, in this shame-based culture, a preoccupation with maintaining face can result in emphasising appearance more than substance. For instance, Sala Phum teachers sometimes seemed more concerned with how they appeared to external observers than what their students are learning as indicated by one male teacher: “If there is a visit from cluster school or district [monitoring team], we need to work hard for the school’s honour and my own honour as a teacher” (I-P65). This could be one reason why teachers tended to call on the same good readers or “smart students” when their class was being observed. It may have been perceived as a way to demonstrate their own teaching competence.

Observation at the school level, and conversation with various adult stakeholders, provide further evidence of this pre-occupation:

- A School Committee member said he checks in on the school breakfast programme to “see whether they are clean or messy. If the children are messy with eating, I tell the teachers. Then I go back home.” (I-P54)
- One school Vice Director indicated that he was chosen for that position because, “I have neat handwriting.” (I-P73).
- At least one Director seemed particularly focused on appearance – in morning speeches when he repeatedly told children to park their bicycles neatly or not
to litter the school-yard, as well as to explain to the research team what CFS means (clean yard, green school, all children wearing uniforms).  (O-P52)

- Teachers expressed their understanding that a major purpose of the Children’s Committee was to keep things orderly and tidy.
- Both teachers and children find group work uncomfortable. Teachers expressed discomfort because it is chaotic and offends cultural sensibilities about how orderly school/life should be (I-P67; I-P82); students were unhappy with the “messy” nature of it (I-P49, girl student FGD).

And this same phenomenon was highlighted by one long-term expatriate advisor who relayed the anecdote recorded below in Box 12.

**Box 12: Example of “form before substance”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forma ante substantia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This anecdote kind of captures it. I was trying to work with teachers to organise an exhibition on different topics. So we went into the library; and the librarian said, “You can’t do your research in here, this is a library!” She probably meant we were going to create some noise. But it just kind of captured a certain way of thinking that everything has its place and appearance is very important and the substance is not. I think that one way to really describe what’s going on in Cambodia is <em>forma ante substantia</em> ... form before substance. That really is – it’s the infrastructure, the equipment, the school grounds, it’s what things look like. It’s not really what’s going on in the classroom, in teachers’ heads and students’ heads. (I-A18)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In educational terms, one result is that people regard a certificate/diploma as more important than the knowledge or skills that it (ostensibly) represents. In the context of a political/education system with few accountability mechanisms and where corruption (buying of results, certificates, etc.) is rife (McNamara, 1999b), the aim of facilitating learning will be difficult to achieve.

**Individualised Instruction**

Emphasis on individual ability, and individualised instruction, is antithetical to prevailing social norms of harmony and conformity. Focusing on individual children requires a certain amount of independent thinking and creativity on the part of teachers too, which
contrasts with the dominant perspective that: “Teaching students doesn’t depend on the teachers; we follow the ways from the management” (I-P56).

**Expectations of certainty**

Another feature of local pedagogical practice is what Pearson (2011) dubs “expectations of certainty: defined as the belief that there are only right or wrong answers” (p. 15). This truncates the possibility of genuine mutual exploration or independent contribution, as conventional wisdom says the answer is always held by the teacher.

From my observation notes of cluster schools. *At the back of the class, the RA and I have a discussion about taking notes. I say that in Canada we take notes on our own in class, and that no two sets of notes from any two students would be alike. She says that in Cambodia the student thinks that only what the teacher writes is fully correct – therefore, students must reproduce in full what the teacher has written.* (P82, field notes)

Related to this need for certainty, and an emphasis on whole-sale transmission of information, many expatriate educators note a peculiar propensity for crystallising concepts, rather than modifying and applying them to teaching practice. Pearson suggests that teachers “expect simply to be a conduit to pass on knowledge” (2011, p. 14) through a “conveyor belt approach” in which “[teachers] get new content or rules from someone else and then transfer this to others in the same way” (p. 14). Another expatriate educator describes his attempt to introduce a concept basic to educators in North America – Bloom’s Taxonomy, a model suggesting three main domains of educational activity: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor each of which contains different types of learning, from simple to complex – as follows:

I feel kind of like Dr. Frankenstein in some respects…you know [Bloom’s taxonomy] is a very rough conceptual tool. There are lots of exceptions to it. And as in anything, you have to use it flexibly. But people are so rigid in applying it, they seized on it like an ideology! They will argue for hours – is this a comprehension question or is it an application question, going back and forth, losing the whole point! (I-A18)
Punitive vs. positive reinforcement

There appears to be a proclivity for punitive rather than positive emphasis in behaviour management. Describing his rationale for selecting particular topics to address in morning assembly, the Sala Phum Director explained: “Even small mistakes I raise during that time, to keep students alert to what is right and what is wrong!” One NGO worker responsible for the educational component of a micro-enterprise project explained that Khmer are afraid to use nice words of affirmation, because it may spoil people and make them proud. Teachers echoed this sentiment. “The encourage method is difficult; if teachers just use words, students don’t listen” (I-P70). Several teachers said “The strategy of encouraging students makes them not afraid so now they don’t even come to school” (I-P68). One Director said: “I prefer strict to soft because it makes students remember” (I-P53). This ambivalence is also clearly seen in discussion about current practices of discipline and punishment in the classroom. The same school Director unambiguously stated: “I think punishment is more effective but the law now does not allow that!” (I-P53)

Child rearing practices

Traditional beliefs about raising children and assumptions that underpin those beliefs, provide a window into cultural views of education, and also intimate how traditional practices might inhibit educational success or achievement (Rodier, 1999; Smith-Heffner, 1993). Rodier (1999) suggests that in Cambodia, there is minimal intentional stimulation by parents of children 0-5 years because of belief that a child’s destiny is pre-conditioned; and secondly, the notion that a child is caught between two worlds and if shown too much attention or affection, will be snatched back by the original mother (death). During this time, in recognition of their divine nature, young children are catered to and seldom contradicted, no matter how they
behave. Not surprisingly, children experience an abrupt and shocking transition when they go to school, where they are suddenly expected to behave as small adults (Nonoyama & Bredenber, 2008).

As children mature, communication with adults tends to be in the form of orders from adults, not dialogue or encouragement of discovery. Curiosity and questioning of superiors, including children to parents, is viewed as a lack of respect (Howes & Ford, 2011; Pearson, 2011). Applied to the classroom, it is easy to see that the teacher/student dyad, like that of parent/child relationship, is [ideally] characterised by distance, discipline, and didactic instruction (from teacher/parent) to be received and obeyed by respectful student/child (Chandler, 1996). A recent assessment of existing Children’s Councils (KAPE, 2009) provides insight into how adult educational stakeholders actually view children.25 Clearly, these perspectives are at odds with a truly “child centred” focus that is at the heart of CFS.

- The survey found that 89 percent of stakeholders thought “teachers [rather than children] need to lead the councils for them to work.”
- 92 percent agreed that “an important idea behind the councils is to help teacher and directors better control the children.”
- 78 percent agreed that “all children must participate in the councils, those who don’t must be forced to do so.”

Of course it would be interesting to know how and why those disagreeing with these propositions mediate their views within the same antagonistic cultural environment as those who agreed: why are some able to do it while most others cannot? Perhaps middle ground is the only possible solid ground on which to build an effective national education system in Cambodia, and exploration of “positive deviance” would be a useful way to identify viable compromise that facilitates learning within the framework of the Cambodian worldview.

25 Another relevant finding was that 76 percent of respondents thought it impossible to have effective Children’s Councils without access to external (NGO) funding.
Cambodian parents traditionally express formal consent for teachers to take responsibility for their children – the implicit charge is for moral instruction and character development (still often promoted through severe corporal punishment) as well as for the inculcation of “knowledge” (Reyes, 2009; Rodier, 1999; Smith-Heffner, 1993). Parents consider that they have fulfilled their obligation to get children grown and into school; now it is up to the teacher. This hands-off approach is epitomised in the traditional proverb *toke dtye penake, kome owe dtye bat-dye, bat-cheung baan howee* (lit. *keep the eyes, don’t break hand or leg*) which is understood to mean that the teacher has *carte blanche* to take any measures necessary to ensure the child learns, including corporal punishment, and parents will not interfere. The teacher must not hurt the eyes or break limbs, as this would render the child completely useless, but it is ok to otherwise hit the child as necessary. One result of this mindset is that parents seldom cross the boundaries between home and school: the two spheres operate almost completely independently of one another. In addition, metaphorically a school is regarded as second family, and teachers as second parents (I-A22; I-A23) – this may also partially explain the reluctance for community and parental involvement in school matters, as what happens within families is considered private, and not the concern of any non-family members.

On a related note, was the idea expressed by several adult stakeholders (parents and grandparents), that parents cannot force their children to do anything, whether to go to school, to learn, to assume a particular occupation. Rather, these decisions were said to rest with the individual child her/himself, as illustrated by the following statements from research respondents.

- “Parents don’t know other languages [so they cannot teach their children], but teachers know. First parents have the idea for children to go learn, and then
the teachers teach them. Also, it depends on the child by himself or herself, too, what they want to learn [how motivated they will be].” (G-P12, one mother participating in parents FGD)

- “I want my children to go to university also [in addition to completing high school], but I don’t know exactly yet [if this will happen]. It depends on the children themselves.” (G-P3, mother)

**Commitment to schooling**

Despite so many practical obstacles, and obvious quality deficiencies, the majority of Cambodian parents continue sending their children to school. And they send them, in record numbers, at great expense, despite their own lack of formal education, and even when those children are required to repeat the same grade two or three times (Bray & Bunly, 2005).

“Commitment of these Khmer parents to schooling is based on a combination of values, including, most important, a traditional respect for educated persons, particularly teachers, and the belief that the educated are in some sense both intellectually and morally superior” (Smith-Heffner, 1993, p. 138).

Ledgerwood & Vijghen (2002) concur that people who hold knowledge or teach in Cambodia are influential and highly respected, by virtue of their role rather than particular skills, and even despite limited skills and/or knowledge. Clearly this would be an attractive feature for families, and motivation to get their children educated. This energetic and pervasive commitment to schooling also appears in part to result from a general equating of “school” with “salary/employment”, a connection attributable to the French educational influence (Ayers, 2000; Chandler, 2008; Clayton, 1995; Duggan, 1996; Fergusson & LeMasson, 1997).

The importance that Cambodian parents place on “school” is further underscored by the results of a recent UNICEF-funded study on attitudes toward residential care (read:
orphanages) which found that education was the most commonly given reason for placing children in residential care.

Education was cited as a major reason for placing children in residential care in almost every interview conducted for this research. It was mentioned by MoSVY staff, local government, residential care directors and families, both with and without children in care. A significant 89.4 per cent of families believed children in residential care received a better education than those living in the village, and 91.9 per cent of families surveyed agreed/definitely agreed with the statement “A very poor family should send a child to an orphanage for education if they cannot afford to pay for the child’s education in the village.” (UNICEF, 2011a, p. 48)

Interestingly, this report also found that there was little empirical evidence for the notion that children in care receive better education – in fact, many children living in residential care do not attend school of any kind, and many are illiterate.

Benefits and barriers: Perspective from the field

Parents and caregivers26 participating in the research FGD were all positively disposed toward formal education, associating education with a good future, good behaviour, and good life. Caregivers overwhelmingly identified the most important reason for sending children to school as “che dung”, literally – to be able to know. For Khmer, this is a complete thought, though in English the obvious follow-up question is: “know what”? Only when it was suggested by interviewer questions did parents identify specific skills children could learn in school; and then, all were expressed as concrete abilities (reading, writing, math, foreign languages, growing vegetables, drawing) rather than abstract higher-order thinking skills or in terms of “lifelong learning.” In order of importance, skills of literacy and numeracy topped the list.

26 Parents and primary caregivers are considered synonymous in this study. Several dozen children who attend Sala Phum primary are being raised/cared for primarily by grandparents because parents are absent for employment.
Caregivers were unanimous in making an association between “going to school” and “good “employment” expressed as good job, good salary, and better standard of living than their parents. It appears, then, that formal certification is what is most highly valued, not necessarily the knowledge/skills such certification [theoretically] represents. Paradoxically, in regard to actually obtaining employment, “knowledge” (synonymous with formal education) was regarded by several people as less important than kasaye (networks of relationships).

Character development was highlighted as another major benefit of school attendance. Specifically, caregivers hoped/expected that children would learn respect for elders, morality (always expressed in terms of physical deportment), gentleness, right thinking, wisdom, and honour; and would not become involved with gangs, would not murder, and not steal. Closely related to this, parents also regard school as a vital source of moral education/instruction and have high expectations for teachers to perform this role. This same sentiment surfaced in the UNICEF (2011) report on residential care which found that many participants linked education directly to “being a good person” (p. 50). People with education were described as “having knowledge and respect.” Further, the report suggests that the distinction between people with/without formal education was regarded as a defining feature of a person’s identity. For instance, one mother in a focus group said: “It is hard to talk to uneducated people; they have a difficult time to understand.” A Commune Council member said: “The uneducated cannot lead a good life and will do bad things” And as a third example, the father of a child in residential care stated: “Those who have education can see good things and copy and follow.”

While stating that they thought the wat did/should play some role, parents clearly identified “school” as the primary locus for “education about morality”. This hands-off approach to education is symbolised by the still prevalent, though waning practice of parents
“giving” their boys to the monks for education/instruction. Both the wat and the family make a tacit agreement that responsibility for the boy/s rests solely with the wat, and parents do not engage.

Life was seen to be “easier” for an educated person – as one grandmother exclaimed: “When you know a lot, you can do everything – even work for a company!” (I-P8). Other villagers explained: “The one who knows nothing (aht che) uses energy to earn money and that is a hard life forever” (G-P14). During a conversation with three grandmothers in the host village, one said: “If you don’t go [to school] you will be other people’s slave; even if you can’t find a good job afterward, at least you would be able to read and write which is better than nothing” (I-P79). The UNICEF study (2011, p. 49) contained some similar examples of this idea that formal education makes life easier (see Table 10 below).

Table 10: Parental attitudes toward education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental attitudes</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School as moral instruction.</td>
<td>“Those without education seem like boats without rudders, and those with education can get jobs.” (mother of a child in residential care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education for employment</td>
<td>“I do not want my children to have to work as hard as I do. I want them to have an education.” (father of a child in residential care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education for better quality life, standard of living.</td>
<td>“When they do not go to school they live by physical labour. Even when they marry they remain poor. Uneducated people marry uneducated people and the ignorance goes on to their children” (grandfather, focus group discussion).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education makes life easier. Education breaks poverty cycle.</td>
<td>“If they had lived with me their future would have been bad. They might have picked up waste/scavenged for the whole of their lives.” (mother of a child in residential care)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, adults also believed that education represented an investment in their own future/s too: “We want children to be able to help parents in old age, to repay the “milk debt”” (I-P81).

Caregivers identified family honour as yet another benefit of child participation in school – “it gives honour and face to the family if children are in school” (G-P14). A major related theme
expressed frequently by caregivers was a perception that one benefit of school was that their children would not be cheated or tricked. One group put it this way: “Our hearts don’t want to see our Khmer next generation be stupid!” (G-P54). And in many ways, caregivers expressed the hope and desire that children would have a better life than parents as the following indicative respondent statements show:

- “I want children to know more than parents, not to be stupid like me.” (stated in four different caregiver FGDs)
- “If they don’t know like me, then their life will be difficult.” (I-P7)
- “I want my children to know [che]. I don’t want them to be stupid [l’ngung] like their mother.” (I-P3)
- “I force my children to school because I want them to have knowledge. I don’t want them to be uneducated [aht che] and stupid [l’ngung] like me.” (I-P9)

In summary, frequently cited reasons for obtaining formal education, or the anticipated benefits of such, can be combined into seven categories of livelihood/employment, family, character/morality/deportment, knowledge/skills, honour/“face”, a better life, and national development. In addition, parent FGD were asked if they could give any metaphors of what education (or lack of it) was like. The most common word-picture, stated by all the groups though not in precisely the same way, was that of “no knowledge [i.e. no school] means we are blind, in darkness” (and knowledge was equated with light). Examples of detailed responses from the four caregiver interviews are included in Table 11 below.

Children’s responses closely mirrored caregiver responses as they also identified seven similar categories of benefits of formal education. These can be summarised as: employment/good future; get knowledge; learn literacy/good speaking skills; not be stupid and not get cheated; learn to be gentle, have morality, be respectful, do right action and right thinking; make a contribution to family (“I must help my family by studying hard”); and contribution to community and national development.
Table 11: Parental reasons for sending children to school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of response</th>
<th>Details/specific statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Livelihood / Employment (both individual and family)</td>
<td>“Have a good future.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Can get good job and good salary.” [good standard of living]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Can choose job they want.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Stupid [uneducated] people don’t have enough rice.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Earn money to feed parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do work around the house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children who go to school can give ideas to parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“If student gets knowledge, she/he can get money to support mother.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character / Morality / Physical deportment Character / Morality / Physical deportment</td>
<td>Know how to respect parents/elders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t do violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Grow up and not become a thief or kill others.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not using drugs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have “right thinking.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Be gentle, be moral, can give respect to old people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge / Skills</td>
<td>To know (che; che dung; chomnay dung)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Know numbers; can read; know a foreign language (listed by all parent FGD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other subjects/skills listed by some FGD parents: skill of growing vegetables, art, know how to sing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Face” / Honour</td>
<td>“If go to school, you have honour, respect from people in community.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can’t be cheated/tricked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“If they get a job, that gives honour to their parents.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“They will be no more stupid.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A better life</td>
<td>“I am a know-nothing; I do not want my child to know nothing.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Not have a hard life like me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The one who knows nothing uses [physical] energy to earn money and that is a hard life forever!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National development</td>
<td>“Can help the country develop.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Can help community.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Across various respondent groups, the three main types of barriers preventing families from sending children to school were identified as poverty, logistical issues, and family attitude. Other reasons given more than once were children “too big” (over-age) and “teachers are lazy and the class is not interesting so children stop attending.” Poverty as an obstacle to
school attendance and achievement was noted to play out in at least five different ways, as illustrated by the indicative statements in Table 12 below.

**Table 12: Effects of poverty on education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effects of poverty on education</th>
<th>Details/specific statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category of response</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Shame, embarrassment**        | Children have no money to purchase materials so they are embarrassed to go to school, or not allowed to attend.  
                                 | “Only have one uniform, hard to keep clean; so the children are shy to go to school.” |
| **Logistical issues & Security issues** | Children do not have a bicycle and therefore have difficulty getting to a school which is located far from their home. (P4 grandmother)  
                                 | School is too far away (usually expressed as security concern – parents are afraid something will happen to their child, read: girl, on way to/from public school so they prohibit children, read: girls, from attending). |
| **Must earn money**             | Children can work for 10,000 riel ($2.50) per day and this work is easier than going to school. Also, their wage contributes to family income and this is good.  
                                 | Parents sometimes require their children to stop school in order to work in the family business  
                                 | “I decided to quit school because my mother was very poor, she had no money for supporting the family; my father had died already.” (I-P4, grandmother)  
                                 | “Parents are too busy [earning a living] to encourage their children to go to school.” |
| **Corruption**                  | “The rich have advantage – they can pay to pass any test or any obstacle.”  
                                 | “Poor children cannot pay for rien kuar [tutoring] therefore they will not pass.” |
| **Low salaries, insufficient budget support from MoEYS central, insufficient infrastructure.** | Teachers and administrators alike are blamed low teacher salaries for the poor attitude that teachers have, and for preventing teachers from having sufficient time to prepare for class (as during non-school hours they must work to earn money), and for not taking school seriously (and as a result, often cancelling classes).  
                                 | No money for materials and supplies is demoralising.  
                                 | A former teacher, and grandfather of a Grade 4 girl at Sala Phum, highlighted how discouraging it is for teachers to work hard and be paid little because salary is equated with respect and recognition. |
Family attitude was commonly noted by teachers and administrators (and less frequently by parents themselves) as a major factor, not just in whether or not children attended school, but also in their educational performance. Several teachers at Sala Phum lamented in individual interviews and group discussions that: “There is not enough advice from parents to children; parents must encourage more.” And talking about one of the catchment villages that had a reputation for poor-performing students, a Sala Phum Grade 5 teacher observed: “Some parents today are bad; they are too tired after a long day of working to interact with their children.” An NGO staff member who used to be a primary school teacher decried the fact that:

“Due to the fact that [parents] think when the children go to school, whether they understand or not depends on the teachers. And when the children return home they can play anything they want, their parents don’t care even if the children stop going to school. As a result, the studying result is not so good.” (I-P34).

And, as a final example, a Grade 4 teacher at Sala Phum summarised:

“Now I will tell you about the worst student in my class. The reason that they are not good is because they don’t have a strong foundation. The family is not rich and the parents are uneducated and they don’t care much. When the child goes home from school, the family does not lead them to study.” (I-P62)

Educational quality and (or) relevance were not listed by a single village respondent as reasons not to attend school. Most caregivers conceptualised “quality” in terms of “quantity” and access. That is, when asked for their opinion about the quality of education today compared with education in previous periods, responses nearly always equated access with quality, as illustrated in the following response which was provided by two FGD and one individual respondent: “Now the government requires physically handicapped children to participate in school, so the quality is better than before.”
Community participation

Another vigorously promoted component of the CFS framework, involving students, families, and community, is deemed so important that it is actually an independent Dimension (5). Community is a notoriously difficult concept to define, with at least 94 alternative definitions available (Bray, 2003, p. 33). The bases for coming together range from politics to religion to geography to shared concerns for particular issue (Bray, 2003). The concept is rendered more complex by virtue of its dynamic nature and the possibility of multiple (simultaneous) membership/s. For Cambodia, the complexities are exacerbated by the blight of internecine conflict, war, colonisation, genocide, famine, forced collectivisation, and authoritarian leadership. In June 1999, international and local non-governmental organisations convened to discuss the meaning of community in the Cambodian context (Thion, 1999). The meeting ended with distinct disagreement between Khmer and foreigners, and no agreement amongst foreigners except a vague appeal to humanitarian ideals of equality and mutuality that was not readily evident on the Cambodia social landscape. Most Khmer equat(ed) “community” with “village.” That is, in a geographic sense that had functional element but not a one-to-one correlation though Buddhist wats are a central feature (Thion, 1999, p. 13).

The clamorous debate regarding Cambodian perspectives on the nature and extent of community has recently been revitalised. Though perhaps diminishing, a picture still persists of Cambodia as a fragmented, ruined society all “social institutions…[and] the various bonds that tied people to one another…swept away, leaving only atomized individuals floundering in grief and fear” (Ledgerwood & Vijghen, 2002, p. 109). Some still question whether community solidarity, beyond nuclear family and blood kinship lines, has ever been part of the Khmer socio-cultural make-up (Frings, 1994; Ovesen, Trankell & Ojendal, 1996). The
Theravada Buddhist emphasis on personal merit is sometimes invoked to support this view (Bit, 1999). An alternate perspective contends that traditional extra-familial solidarity has traditionally been strong, but was weakened first by years of civil unrest, then nearly destroyed during the Pol Pot era, and what good will remained was further ravaged under ensuing enforcement of collective action (Khum samaki) by a pro-Vietnamese government. This view asserts that slowly Cambodia is returning to these traditional forms of social interaction and interdependence. Ledgerwood and Vijghen (2002) propose a counter-narrative, offering that “…Khmer society is neither mad, destroyed, nor returning to a nostalgic past. Rather it is constantly being re-created, re-imagined, and negotiated through the everyday actions of people going about their lives” (pp. 109-110). They also suggest, however, that links to the past persist, and that kinship and patronage remain central to Khmer social organisation, though not in the classic patron-client sense which exists in other parts of Southeast Asia (Kato, Kaplan, Chan & Real, 2000; Pak et al., 2007).

For the purpose of addressing involvement of community in the Cambodian educational system, community is defined here according to two criteria: in geographic terms (as the people living within the physical catchment area served by a particular school/s) and secondly, in functional terms (cooperation for the benefit of the school/education). In other words, “local community” is more than simply a set of people; it is a geographically distinct set of people cooperating with one another for mutually agreed reasons. Historical community involvement in Cambodian education is clearly delineated: prior to and during the French administrative era, communities are reported to have contributed through construction and maintenance of wat and khum school facilities and families paid fees for their boy/s in attendance (Pellini, 2007). The current situation is slightly more complex. In trying to ascertain the current parameters of
local participation, it is important to distinguish between (the collective result of) individual household involvement (for its own purpose) and community involvement (collaborative, for wider aims). Household contribution to education in Cambodia is significant. In fact, Cambodian education is some of the most expensive in the world in relation to the proportion paid by families. Bray & Bunly (2005) estimate that household contribution could be as high as 56 percent of the total expenditure for basic education in Cambodia. In individual terms, poor households contribute just over one-quarter of their non-food expenditure to education and this figure is just over 10 percent for rich households (World Bank, 2006a).

If community is defined in terms of cooperation beyond family, it must be conceded that there has been limited community involvement in the development or implementation of formal primary education system in Cambodia, for urban areas less than rural areas. If community is defined in terms of cooperation beyond family, it must be conceded that there has been limited community involvement in the development or implementation of formal primary education system in Cambodia, for urban areas less than rural areas. Where it occurs, community involvement most often takes material/logistical form – provision of money and/or labour for school repairs or building construction, gathering funds from which to disburse small grants to enable poor families to pay informal school fees or buy requisite supplies, or time for organising special events (Pellini, 2007; Shoraku, 2008a, 2008b; World Bank, 2006a). It is also the case that people in a village “encourage” families whose children have erratic attendance or are not enrolled at all, to keep/get their children into school. There is little engagement by anyone other than school staff and teachers, in elements of education beyond physical infrastructure (Shoraku, 2007). Where community involvement beyond these material forms does occur in Cambodia, it is often at the behest of international NGOs

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27 In contrast to Khmer areas, there has been significant community participation among indigenous ethnic minority communities around basic education (and prior to that – in the development of the written version of their language – orthography, vocabulary, dictionaries, pedagogy, and materials development) (Gregerson, 2009). Parent-Teacher Associations and School Support Committees are reported to be very active and pro-active (CARE, 2008). This has been promoted exclusively by INGOs who are often at odds with MoEYS over minority language-use and education issues.
Blame for non-involvement is usually placed by the MoEYS at the feet of parents, described as “too busy”, “shy”, not interested, not capable, lacking adequate knowledge, and so forth (Shoraku, 2008a).

Limited participation by parents and communities is not unique to Cambodia, but is also characteristic of other low-income country contexts (Pellini, 2007), though it may have unique dimensions in Cambodia. One obvious reason is a lack of time due to livelihood requirements: the majority of rural Cambodians engage in subsistence agriculture and petty trade (C-Y. Kim, 2009; World Bank, 2005a). A second reason for parental non-involvement may be lack of awareness by parents about opportunities for participation. A third may be lack of motivation because they feel they are not listened to nor respected by school authorities as they are uneducated and therefore incapable, or simply a sense that the “modern system” is impenetrable. Cultural dispositions may also hinder involvement. For instance, parents traditionally do not push their children to participate or to excel because of a belief that children are born with a re-determined set of skills (R.Y. Kim, 2005; Rodier, 1999; Smith-Heffner, 1993); this laissez-faire attitude may simply extend to the school. The culturally-defined sense of clear division between home and school (described earlier) may also prohibit parents from wanting to engage with schools.

Reluctance for engagement may be mutual: most Cambodian teachers (and administrators) are formally educated to a level just above their students (Benveniste, Marshall & Araujo, 2008; Marshall et al., 2009). Thus teachers may lack confidence in their own teaching capacity and knowledge-base. As well, in the traditional Cambodian hierarchical society, each layer of the civil society expected/anticipated to be interacting/negotiating with another level requires an exercise of considerable deference to the layer above it. Indeed
impoverished rural parents feel unable to address teachers who are a layer above them; those teachers defer to school principles and administrators; and administrators do as they are told by central-level authorities.

Pellini’s (2007) exploration of “the bonding link between members of School Associations, bridging links and spaces of participation between traditional associations, and the institutional links between associations and schools, as well as Commune Councils” (p. 112), represents the most comprehensive study on community participation to date. At the community level, Pellini identified the involvement of official, formalised committees and informal groups (for which he uses the term “School Associations”). He summarises, “The main task of the School Association is to discuss with teachers and/or the headmaster, usually at the end of the school year, the needs of the school and the required financial support” (Pellini, 2007, p. 120). Further, Pellini (2007) identified several characteristics of non-official support and interaction. Association members are often local (formal) authorities and elderly people (a “benevolent elite” more paternalistic than empowering, p. 154): many have roles in multiple other associations and there is little cooperation or communication between Associations. Women participate in only about half of the School Associations. The main motivation for all members to join was “for merit” (p. 126), rather than achievement of a specific purpose per se.\textsuperscript{28} Resources (cash) are usually gathered during religious (Buddhist) ceremonies (and not specific to education, but these general funds are also used for other purposes). Associations have a distinct preference for contributing to the development of infrastructure and their main forms of contribution consist of money, labour, and organising of ceremonies. Teaching itself is seldom a topic of discussion between associations and schools.

\textsuperscript{28} Pellini noted that there is a level of distrust between ordinary community members and those involved in Associations, and suggested that the implicit values of prestige or power may also be motivating factors.
Finally, Pellini noted weak demand by Association members for feedback: only the core committee members are involved in decision-making. If informed at all, this is done during village meetings or as part of religious ceremonies. “Participants rarely ask questions due to low literacy levels and the belief that leaders managing the Associations are the most appropriate members of the community to do so” (2007, p. 127). Distrust or disapproval is demonstrated by failure to contribute or not showing up at meetings (p. 127). In summary, there appear to be traditional mechanisms for community involvement with schools, but the nature of involvement is limited. Regardless of the ostensible affiliation (education, agriculture, health, etc.), the general operational framework and activities of Associations is similar: material contributions, rather than substantive involvement in planning or other “soft” activities (Shoraku, 2008b).

There are many reasons that community participation founders in Cambodia, cultural predispositions foremost among them as just described. Another key reason seems to be is that there is minimal cultural precedent for the type of participation (Kato, 2000; World Bank, 2005). Thus, “promotion of participation in education through the creation of ‘institutional spaces’ of participation has not been successful because committees and councils designed by the reform have failed to gain a sufficient legitimacy at village and community level” (Pellini, 2007, p. 153). A second practical reason is that expectations are not clearly stipulated for the actors being called upon to participate (parents and communities) (Turner, 2002). Indeed, reference in documents produced by multilateral agencies, as well as MoEYS documents, commonly use “community participation” rather vaguely. It tends to be oriented toward envisioning (an ill-defined) community’s role as contributing resources, but not involved through contributing to planning, or giving of their knowledge, or experience, or ideas. A third
and very practical explanation for why community involvement is limited is that there are simply too many demands on the time of subsistence farmers.

The very few formal assessments that focus on community participation (Pellini, 2007; Shoraku, 2007, 2008; World Bank, 2005a) conclude that there is significant room for greater involvement but that this would require fundamental re-orientation in values by both school staff and parents. As demonstrated in this section, there are cultural, historical, and political reasons for the current status and nature of parental and community involvement in education. While there are increasing spaces and calls for participation, ostensible aims and goals seen to be at odds with both the larger socio-political and cultural environment, and also with traditional dispositions.

**Mind the gap: Philosophical tensions**

All education systems, and perhaps most forms of social organisation, are characterised by a difference between stated goals and aims and the reality of actual implementation or practice. Where clear cultural dissonance exists, this gap is likely to be even more profound. Tan’s (2008) exploration of the curriculum for moral education demonstrates clearly the gap between Cambodian educational rhetoric (read: Western-influenced policy) and wider (Khmer) cultural practices. In her own words:

> How effective is the subject Civics and Morals in helping MoEYS achieve its goal of inculcating in students ‘high standards of morals and ethics and a strong belief in being responsible for their own future’, with ‘the capacity to exercise judgment and responsibility in matters of morality’, possessing ‘a public spirit characterised by equality and respect for others’ rights’, and ‘be active citizens and be aware of social changes, understanding Cambodia’s system of government and the rule of law, and demonstrating a spirit of national pride and love of their nation, religion and king’ (MoEYS, 2004a, p. 11; MoEYS, 2004b, p. 5)? Situated within Cambodia’s social, cultural and political realities, the successful promotion of civic and moral values through Civics and Morals is vitiated by a number of tensions and challenges. (Tan, 2008, p. 563)
Tan concludes that “the prevalent practice of corruption and the cultural preference for social harmony, conformity and passivity make the desired outcomes of civic and moral education difficult to achieve” (2008, p. 560). Indeed, the aims of moral education are not likely to be achieved unless greater cultural/values congruence is achieved – whether by modifying the aims of the curriculum or by changing how business and politics are done in Cambodia.

**Toward a Khmer Philosophy of Education**

There has been to date, little English-language academic inquiry about, or attempts to determine and describe, Cambodian (Khmer) understanding of “knowledge” – that is, inquiry about Khmer epistemology (defined as “the study of or a theory of the nature and grounds of knowledge especially with reference to its limits and validity” (Epistemology, 2012)). It is not for me, an outsider potentially representing imperialist forces, to impose my view of something so fundamental. There is also vigorous debate among educational philosophers in the Western world as to whether or not different cultural groups actually have their own epistemologies (Ruitenberg & Phillips, 2012). Nonetheless, it is my aim to open the discussion at least at the philosophical level, by framing questions and suggesting some elements that may be included.

In an effort to begin addressing this gap, this research intentionally posed related questions, and made observation, about traditional perspectives on teaching and learning livelihood skills in a rural domestic setting; asked teachers and students to brainstorm about the characteristics of good teachers and good students; and asked individual teachers, as well as some parent FGD, to physically represent the relationship between the following four nouns as represented on four separate pieces of paper: teacher, student, learning, and knowledge. In addition, faculty at the Royal University of Phnom Penh and expatriate educators were asked
outright for a definition or description of Khmer epistemology. Their responses provided what could be considered the basis for a rudimentary epistemological framework.

This section begins with a discussion of language and linguistic issues that relate directly to how education is perceived and enacted in Cambodia. Then it explores traditional perspectives on teaching/learning as described by people in the host village before highlighting three additional components for the epistemological frame that surfaced during classroom observation, interviews, and focus groups held with teachers and students.

**Language and linguistic issues**

Language not only conveys concepts and meanings, it also prescribes meaning. That is, choice of language is not merely an objectively descriptive of an object or an event; but, more fundamentally, particular words employed contribute significantly to shape the thinking about the object or event. When working across languages, in this case, Khmer as the national language of Cambodia, and English as the language of instruction for University of British Columbia, there is the added complexity of the fact that language, words and concepts available to the average (or privileged or poverty-stricken) citizen, is as much a result of worldview as a communicator of it. Thus this research gave intentional attention to the issue of “language” used in discussing education in Cambodia; analysing the presence, absence, and application of particular terms by particular stakeholders. It is quite possible that (limited, inaccurate, or non-existent) translation of key educational and policy terms (like CFS or gender) or even an absence of the concept in the Khmer worldview, may be part of the reason for misunderstanding of the fundamental nature of some concepts that Western aid agencies are trying to convey and implement, in this case, promotion of Child Friendly Schools.
First, it is notable that education-related technical language used by the Ministry of Education is much more formal than that used by practitioners at the village level and stands in stark contrast to the strikingly simple and limited vocabulary surrounding learning and education used at the village level, whether by young students, middle-aged teachers, or older administrators. For example, the MoEYS uses *kaseksa* (study) whereas most villagers use the word *rien* which technically means “learn” or study (according to the Headley dictionary, *rien* is defined as: “to study, to learn, to drill, to practice”). *Rien* is also used to mean “school” in a physical sense (students are said to *tev rien* which means “go to school”). It is possible that this language choice is motivated by a desire for precision; but this probably represents an additional hurdle for communities to overcome in engaging with formal education. That is because by using such “high language” the Ministry reinforces a sense of hierarchy and (unwittingly?) communicates technical superiority which may negatively influence the capacity of “local” people to participate in related discussion.

MoEYS uses the Khmer word *apbrum* for “education.” *Apbrum* carries with it a sense of moral and behavioural instruction; or as defined by the venerable Chuan Nat (Cambodia’s definitive dictionary), it means “enculturation”. *Nye noam* was also frequently employed by teachers: Chuan Nat dictionary defines this as “tell the way, to tell the way and to be enlightened, to guide by explaining” and Headley suggests that it has an element of “counselling” attached to it as well. In this case the choice of language may serve to both create an unhelpful distance between the Ministry and end-users of educational products and services (teachers, students, rural communities), but also underscore the notion that formal education is a predominantly moral enterprise and in the service of national development, rather than education as a right, and as a means of equipping people with basic literacy and
learning skills that will likely enhance their quality of life in the future. That is, in human rights language, this casts students and communities in the role of “duty bearers” (traditionally the role of government) rather than “rights holders” which, technically speaking, they are. This is not to suggest that inculcation of morality and character development in individuals, and nation building, are not important or valid aims for a formal education system. However, it is important to consider where primary responsibility for this should lie, and whether or not this continued emphasis hampers local participation and allows RGC to abrogate responsibility for providing quality education that equips Cambodians with skills and perspectives required for an uncertain future.

When speaking of educating/teaching, parents, caregivers, and teachers almost invariably used the word bong rien which means “to teach, instruct, train.” However, the words used most frequently at village level to refer to how parents and elders “assist” children in relation to school were “enculturate” (apbrum) and “guide” (nye noam) – again implicitly referencing a strong inclination toward non-intellectual ideals of morality and character development as the most legitimate aims for formal education.

When parents and caregivers were asked about their reason/s for sending children to obtain formal education, they used variations of the Khmer che (“to know how to do something,” “to be able to do something,” “to be knowledgeable”) and dung (“to know a fact,” “to be informed on some subject”), and often combined these into che dung, or literally “to be able to know”). While “to know” could be regarded as an insufficient, incomplete response in English, in Khmer it appears to be a self-evident truism. When pursued by the researchers to explain what is important for children to know, respondents then listed the subjects currently taught in school (math, Khmer, writing) rather than skills or abilities.
When teachers explained their views on classroom management, they often used the term *nxe noam* or “guide,” as in: “it is important to guide students to study well.” Very few additional terms and synonyms (other than *abprum, rien, nxe noam, che, dung*) relating to the act of “thinking” or “learning” or “doing education” were used by any Cambodian research participant although many would at least have had some exposure to training by the Ministry of Education and to conceptual tools such as Bloom’s Taxonomy as part of CFS training. The list of possible synonyms available in Khmer (as well as in English) could include: analyse, appraise, assess, compare, concepts, critical, create, define, deduce, distinguish, imagine, judge, paraphrase, summarise, synthesise, and think.

Two more examples of common educational concepts will serve to illustrate that common Khmer perspectives on education, as inherently conveyed in everyday language, differ significantly from the Westernised educational norms promoted by the international community. First, Khmer treats as a single word/concept (“rien”) the English verbs “study” and “learn.” In English these are not simply different words, but they represent very different concepts, and one (“study”) could be construed as the means to the other (“learn”) rather than its equivalent. As a second example, during the course of this research, teachers frequently used the words “policy” and “punishment” synonymously; and both the words and concepts of “punishment” and “classroom management” were conflated, apparently difficult for the teachers to differentiate.

Khmer words and phrases used to describe concepts specific to the CFS educational frame also provide some insight into why CFS is understood in a particular way by stakeholders involved in this research. The Khmer rendition of “Child Friendly School,” *sala kokmah maytry*, is a combination of the words for “school building” (*sala*), a very formal word
for “child” (*kokmah* whereas most people talk about children as *khone*) and *maytry* means “to like one another, to be happy or pleased to see each other.” The embedded meaning may well explain why numerous practitioners describe the essence of CFS in terms of children being happy. During this research, we tracked down the precise origins of the Khmer terms. The term was coined by a former male director of Primary Education Department, MoEYS (I-A22). This director explained that he was sent to the Philippines, on an exchange visit to observe how Child Friendly Schools work elsewhere. Upon returning to Cambodia, he found it difficult to find a precise Khmer word/term for CFS. So he named it *sala kokmah maytry* based on his own idea that “friendly” was best matched with the Khmer "*maytry*" as he understood "friendly" to refer to "giving children enjoyable environment at school."

Two Khmer terms are commonly, and interchangeably, used for the English language term “slow learner”: one is *rien kasowee* (*rien* = learn/study; *kasowee* = weak or flabby, a physiological state) and the other is *rien yeut* (*yeut* = slow or slowly; it is the word used to describe the speed at which one is driving a motorcycle, for instance). While it appears that these literal terms are extrapolated and used metaphorically in the context of school (and other settings), still, neither of these translations provides an equivalent of what the English term “slow learner” essentially means in the CFS context. That is, a child who, for whatever reason, has difficulty learning/mastering subject material or skills taught. MoEYS conceptualisation of this concept is also problematic. For this category of students, the CFS teacher guidebook does little to distinguish between 1) physiological reasons for “slowness” (intellectual disabilities or visual, auditory, vocal impairment or mobility constraints) which necessarily has a particular set of issues and attendant responses; and 2) environmental reasons (such as dysfunctional
family relationships); or 3) individual behavioural reasons (playfulness, negligence, wilful disruption) for students being unable to master class and course-work.

When talking about the posters and pictures which are affixed on the walls of “truly” CFS classrooms, people speak of *tope tyng* (or just *tyng*) which literally translates as “decoration” and would be the same word used to describe hanging tinsel for New Year celebration or setting up a decorative arch for a wedding ceremony. This translation too may help explain why teachers tended to see the purpose of “decorations” on their wall as making the environment attractive for children (rather than as being an aid to learning, and a celebration of student achievement as the CFS guidebook explains the purpose).

As discussed in more detail in the Gender section below, there is no Khmer word for the English term “gender”. Rather, the word is usually transliterated into *jendah*. The Cambodian Women’s Media Centre states that the “indirect meaning of *jendah* is referring to the equality of men and women’s responsibilities in developing family and society because in this modern time the expansion of democracy cannot be stopped.” The Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA) expounds: “*Jendah* is referring to the roles/responsibilities of men and women, attitudes, values that society has defined and which society believes is suitable for both sexes.”

**Traditional views on teaching/learning skills**

In the context of everyday life in the village, the terms “learn” and “teach” are seldom utilised. Rather, the process of transmuting skills/knowledge is regularly described in terms of modelling (“watch and do”). To question/s such as “How do children in your household/village learn to do domestic tasks such as cooking rice or transplanting rice in the field?”; “How do you [elder] teach skills to your children?”; and “How did you [child] learn
how to [cook rice or ride a motorcycle]?” members of the researcher’s host family, and other residents of Phum Ko used such representative phrases as listed below in Box 13.

**Box 13: Local descriptions of learning process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local descriptions of the learning process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Don’t learn – just do and we know.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Because I want to learn, then I know.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandmother: “I never teach, I tell; they do.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Watch and see”….</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “Like a chicken with its mother, just follow!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “Follow and do like others do.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “Learn by observing others.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “I followed, I learned, later I knew.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “Go, follow, and do.” <em>(tev tham neung tve)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I advise <em>(nye noam)</em>; but I don’t teach <em>(bongrien)</em>.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In these conversations, both villagers and teachers contrasted traditional models of teaching/learning with “school” – in life, you use what you are learning, and you practice it [unlike the classroom]!

Another common feature that occurred in conversation about local history was a statement to the effect that it is the habit of Cambodians to pass information from one generation to another, from old to young. This took the form of statements such as: “I don’t know, but we just hear this history from the old people….” The disclaimer indicates not so much a lack of knowledge as it situates the speaker as a secondary source, as therefore not responsible for accuracy. Perhaps it also has a sense of suggesting that because the speaker had not seen or experienced the event first-hand, he or she could not know with certainty. At any rate, this referencing to knowledge received from older people was very common.

**Emphasis on Teaching vs. Learning**

With the exception of some expatriate educational professionals, virtually no research participants talked about “learning.” Focus was almost exclusively on the act of “teaching.”
This observation may be complicated by linguistic limitations. In Khmer, the word used most often for “learn” is “rien” which covers both studying and learning (it is defined by Headley as: “to study, to learn, to drill, to practice” and by Chuan Nath as ”study, observe to know, get knowledge, or train.” The more formal Khmer word “seksa” (defined by Headley as “study” and by Chuan Nath as “remember, learn, train, knowledge, practice, fluency”) is not often used by rural Cambodians.

Furthermore, teachers tend to blame students for failure to learn/achieve, stating specifically: students are too young/too small to start school; students were advanced a grade when the previous teacher should not have passed them because “they know nothing”; the student him/herself doesn’t care and doesn’t respect the teacher so they do not learn; or a student is from a bad family (inference being, therefore they cannot learn). A small number of teachers blamed the RGC policy of inclusion for poor school achievement because, in contrast to previous eras, “Now everyone comes to school, not only those who want to learn, and we can’t help them if they don’t want to learn” (I-P67).

These findings correlate with a recent CITA study (2011) in which teachers identified “limited ability and knowledge of students” (8.7 percent of respondents) and “students do not pay attention in study” (7.2 percent) as two reasons for poor quality education. Bernard (2008, p. 32) also notes that most teachers “continue to see their main challenges as external to themselves e.g. their low pay; students’ poor punctuality and frequent absences; lack of teaching and learning materials; a curriculum too heavy to ‘get across’ to the children.”

**Locus for learning**

Implicitly, this research sought to understand who is considered responsible for various aspects of the educational endeavour. Overall it is possible to see that teachers and schools are
reluctant to take responsibility for student achievement much less “learning.” Teachers stated that students are responsible for themselves – summarised as: “the main reason for success depends on the individual student”. Teachers couched this in different ways – saying, for instance, that for grades “It depends on how much/how willing a student is to learn/know.” The Sala Phum Director said he could not give an opinion on which method for teaching reading is more effective because “it depends on the student.” One Grade 6 teacher explained that, “It is because of the students themselves; not because of the teacher since the teacher teaches all equally…” (I-P72).

Often teachers blame students for their inability to learn or get good grades: “the main thing that makes them cannot do is they are not trying their best” (I-P65). Students who do not concentrate, who do not try, who do not “learn” will not succeed. Teachers seem to blame MoEYS or (frequently) the “poor foundation” of their students, as a reason why the students are not doing very well. Teachers do not appear take responsibility for ensuring that they address those weaknesses in their students; therefore it is not considered to be the teacher’s fault if students fare poorly in school. Teachers seem resigned to the status quo of having large numbers of “weak students” in their classes (reported average is up to half the class) – explaining that “those who are weak are still weak… [even after instruction from teacher…].” And: “Academically weak students are happy with play so they don’t catch lessons” (I-P57). Teachers were also quick to blame students’ family environment for “weak students.” As one teacher sweepingly intoned, “The weak students usually come from poor families. The children who don’t achieve well at school are mostly those who have poor parents.” (I-P63)

While family members and caregivers are quick to assert both an expectation and aspiration that schools teach morality to students, teachers assigned responsibility for
inculcation of morals across a wider spectrum of stakeholders: community, family, school, and the *wat*. Perhaps an indicator of creeping secularism, the *wat* was explicitly identified as the least influential source of moral instruction.

**Relationship between education, knowledge, learning**

Teachers regard “knowledge” as a finite resource. They indicated a belief that knowledge itself does not change – but that one can possess more or less of it. Given the strict hierarchical nature of Cambodian society, it is not surprising that they hold a zero-sum approach to management of knowledge (holding rather than sharing; telling rather than guiding). This is encapsulated in the Khmer saying “know ten, teach seven” (explained earlier). In keeping with this adage, “teachers will prevent others from achieving their level of knowledge by withholding some of what they know, thus protecting their privileged position in the community” (Pearson, 2011, p. 14).

As CFS is predicated on a constructivist philosophy, the research team asked teachers whether or not they think it possible to “create knowledge together with students”, and whether or not teachers can learn from students. All teachers immediately responded in the affirmative on both questions. However, follow-up examples ran contrary to their assertion – teachers said sometimes they forget [facts, how to spell a word, etc.], and that in those cases students can “remind them” or “they can teach us by telling us the word if we do not know the word.” This seems to indicate that teachers are not deeply convinced about the possibility of knowledge co-creation.
Views of “good student” and “good teacher”

In an effort to understand more deeply about local conceptions of the teaching and learning enterprise, the researchers solicited information about characteristics that are associated with being a “good student” and a “good teacher” from students as well as teachers, administrators, and parents. The responses illuminate local conceptions of what facilitates learning and what learning actually is, variables required for academic/intellectual success, and a sense of what in a Cambodian view, comprises effective teaching.

The characteristics most commonly cited by teachers as identifying “good students” can be summarised as relating to achievement, behaviour, attitude, and family. These are described more fully in Table 13 below, in the form of representative statements. Attention to “learning” appeared to be superficial in responses about what makes a good student; and there was no explicit reference by any respondents to “learning” in discussion of what makes a good teacher.

Table 13: Teacher perspectives on “good student” characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher perspectives on “good student” characteristics</th>
<th>Details / Specific statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of characteristic</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Achievement</strong></td>
<td>“Gets high rank in class (#1).”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Quick to learn.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behaviour</strong></td>
<td>“Industrious.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“On time with homework, studies at home.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Brave to ask questions when s/he doesn’t understand.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Listens well.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Pays attention in class.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude</strong></td>
<td>“Tries hard.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Is gentle.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Has good character.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
<td>Has good family life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents give good advice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents are involved in their life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents understand value of education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As for views of a “good teacher” from students’ perspectives, see Table 14 below which contains a series of illustrative statements made by students during FGD and as part of a drawing exercise in which students accompanied a picture of their favourite teacher with a list of favourite attributes. The attributes which students most appreciated about their teachers can be categorised as competence, appearance, and manner. Additionally, for a few students, the fact that the teacher does not hit them for punishment was positive, while other students said that they prefer a strict teacher.

**Table 14: Student views of “good teacher” characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student views of “good teacher” characteristics</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of characteristic</strong></td>
<td><strong>Details</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>“Very focused in teaching.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“My teacher knows a lot.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Orderly and disciplined [vinay]”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Good at explaining and makes us learn quickly.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Helps me when I make mistakes.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance</td>
<td>“Beautiful.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Tall.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Not black [reference to skin colour]”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Dresses nicely.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manner</td>
<td>Encourages students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is gentle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Honest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fair to all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loves her students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tender speech/good speech.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Good at telling stories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does not curse me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Fairness” and equal treatment of students by teacher was frequently mentioned by students as a positive feature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Good teachers” as seen from a teacher perspective had different attributes from those identified by children about their teachers, and were largely attitudinal (on time, strict with work, have good relationship with students, does preparation for class, gentle, good character,
tries hard, not lazy, strict, careful. As the Sala Phum Director summarised: “it is based on their willingness they are good teacher or not a good teacher…skills may be similar but if there is no heart/love for children then the teacher will not be a good teacher.”

Chapter Summary

Paying particular attention to Cambodia, this chapter has made the case that history and culture matter in very practical and tangible ways to contemporary mass education. Among other factors, Cambodia’s unusually turbulent and violent history has had very real material, psychological, and social impacts, but these are seldom considered in educational planning and implementation. This chapter gave a brief overview of prevailing gender norms, showing that despite a significant amount of rhetoric and policy about gender equality, in fact women remain disadvantaged in all spheres of life, including education. The chapter then demonstrated that employing relevant heuristic devices such as universal cultural schematics enables us to gain a clearer understanding of how local ways and means could be integrated into educational reforms to make more effectively facilitate learning.

The chapter highlighted multiple ways in which a Khmer worldview directly influences conceptualisation and implementation of formal education. I suggest that cognitive dissonance around conflicting values, rather than simply a lack of exposure to international concepts, or a dearth of training about particular reforms more profoundly hinders and shapes the application of international educational ideals. Recognising that an emic rather than etic perspective is likely to be more accurate and certainly more comprehensive and more nuanced, in lieu of any emic academic work on this, I tentatively suggested some elements of a Khmer philosophy of education.
CHAPTER SIX: OVERVIEW OF CFS IN CAMBODIA

Over the past two decades, Cambodia has sported numerous educational reforms, though few as ambitious and comprehensive as Child Friendly Schools. This chapter begins by describing and defining CFS first by placing it in the context of a wider global educational debate as expressed through initiatives promoted by the United Nations, and then within the regional context of Asia. Next, attention is given to Cambodia as a particular context and environment within which CFS occurs, and to detailing the practical outworking at one rural school (Sala Phum Primary School).

In addition to painting a picture of daily schedules and implementation, specific attention is given to describing school administrative practice as it actually happens. This chapter then details particular elements of the primary school curriculum, over and against a child friendly approach to education to demonstrate that Cambodia’s highly centralised educational system, and unique socio-political milieu, both convey and constrain CFS as a concept and practice.

The Global Stage: Evolving Philosophies

In Chapter Two, several competing models of education for development were described. Currently dominating global discourse in this arena is a neoliberal view of education for development (J. Chan, 2007; Hirosato & Kitamura, 2009; Jones, 2007; Lingard, Rawolle & Taylor, 2005; Mundy, 2007; Resnik, 2006). Based on human capital theory, this instrumentalist approach sees education as essentially economic, a “means” to the “end” of economic success and capital accumulation, and largely fails to recognise social and cultural aspects as valid components of education (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Spring, 2009; Wrigley,
A less distilled version of the neoliberal view could be called “human rights developmentalism” (J. Chan, 2007) and this is exemplified in the MDG. This softer approach is not completely devoid of attachment to an economistic outlook; but at least there is attention to human rights, diversity, and “local influence.” A related debate in the development aid for education sector relates to “efficiency vs. effectiveness.” Simply stated, proponents of “efficiency” emphasise how well a system’s products are delivered (usually in terms of numbers of services, or number of people served). In contrast, the “effectiveness” group champions educational quality, defining success in terms of what is actually learned and how such learning is applied. Increasingly, preoccupation with “quality” has come to dominate globalised educational discourse for low-income countries since the 1990 Jomtien World Declaration of Education for all (Alexander, 2008).

**CFS as expression of growing interest in quality issues**

Since the promulgation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 positioned children’s interests more prominently, there have been numerous initiatives to apply the underlying principle of “a child’s best interests” to various spheres and services in which children figure largely, initiatives both public and private. These range from applying the notion of being “child friendly” to the criminal justice system, to micro-enterprise to luxury travel. For education in the low-income country context, “The child-friendly school concept was first used in a systematic way by UNICEF, Save the Children, and the World Health

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Organisation in the mid-1990s, largely as the educational equivalent of the ‘baby-friendly hospitals’ that contributed to quality standards in health” (UNICEF, 2009c, Ch. 1, p. 7).

Unreservedly its major advocate, UNICEF has recently produced the most comprehensive description available of Child Friendly Schools for a developing world context. This is in the form of an implementation manual, *The Child-Friendly Schools Manual* (2009):

As the main proponent of these CFS models, UNICEF has the responsibility of providing a coherent account of them, summarizing their main features so as to create a prototype that can serve as the basis for developing national capacities to design and implement CFS in a wide range of countries (Introduction, p. 4).

UNICEF repeatedly emphasises that CFS is a “pathway to educational quality” rather than a “blueprint” and that “it is counterproductive to regard the CFS model as rigid, with a present number of defining characteristics or key components” (2009c, Ch. 1, p. 9).

The CFS concept is inspired by, and built around, the principles of child rights as expressed in the United Nations’ Convention of the Rights of the Child (UN-CRC) (see: OHCHR, 1989). Fundamentally, CFS promotes implementation of a rights-based, democratic, child-centred educational system. This foundational rights-based ideology generates several corollaries as depicted below in Table 15.

**Table 15: CFS themes arising from philosophical foundation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Source (UNICEF, 2009c)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inclusiveness</td>
<td>No discrimination on any basis, and active incorporation of children and difference, not just passive acceptance.</td>
<td>Ch. 2, p. 9.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child participation</td>
<td>Participation by children in setting the form and substance of their education.</td>
<td>Ch. 2, p. 10.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical health and safety</td>
<td>Safe facilities; non-violence; security on the way to/from school.</td>
<td>Ch. 2, p. 15-16; Ch. 6, p. 7.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community engagement</td>
<td>Active linkages between school and community in planning and school management.</td>
<td>Ch. 4, p. 1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local relevance</td>
<td>Curriculum and content are relevant to students and their particular context.</td>
<td>Ch. 5, p. 23.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>Source (UNICEF, 2009c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Locally responsive and relevant decisions.</td>
<td>Community and school make decisions for their context.</td>
<td>Ch. 4, p. 4.</td>
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</table>

These in turn have an influence on the physical space that is “school,” as well as on the [learning, teaching, relational] activities that occur within that school. The UNICEF CFS manual contains many examples of application of these ideals to an educational setting:

- The aspect in which child participation matters most is in the classroom process of learning and teaching….the classroom process should not be one in which children are passive recipients of knowledge dispensed by a sole authority, the teacher. Rather it should be an interactive process in which children are active participants in observing, exploring, listening, reasoning, questioning and ‘coming to know.’ (Ch. 2, p. 13)
- ….to assist the continuous development of children in a constantly changing world, every learning experience and every learning environment should place children at the centre as active agents of their own learning process. (Ch. 2, p. 13-14)
- For children to develop their full potential, schools must provide learning opportunities that help develop children’s abilities to think and reason, build up their self-respect and respect for others, and think ahead and plan for their future. (Ch. 2, p. 14)
- A child-friendly classroom includes individualized, gender-sensitive instruction together with active, cooperative, democratic group learning activities that are respectful of the rights of the child. (Ch. 6, p. 19)

**CFS as UN strategy in Asia**

Action toward creating child-friendly schools first took root in Asia around 1997 through efforts in Thailand to modulate the Convention on the Rights of the Child into effective “child-friendly” education practice (UNICEF, 2004. CFS is currently being implemented, to varying degrees, with support from UNICEF, UNESCO, and national governments, in 56 countries globally and in 20/28 of the nations comprising UNICEF’s East
Asia and Pacific Region (UNICEF, 2009c; UNICEF, 2005). By 2004 UNICEF had mobilised sufficient structure and order to begin calling CFS a “5-dimensional innovation” consisting of: 1) inclusiveness, 2) effective academically and relevant, 3) health, safety, protection for children, 4) gender responsiveness, and 5) engaged and enabling of, student, family and community participation (UNICEF, 2004).

Cambodia’s involvement with CFS began in 2000 when its Ministry of Education representatives participated, along with UNICEF and SC-Norway staff, in a regional conference on CFS environments held in Chiang Mai, Thailand (MoEYS, 2005a, p. 1). In March 2005, MoEYS representatives participated in a regional workshop in Pattaya, Thailand to review the progress of CFS. At that time, with some minor differences, participating countries devised their own “dimensions” or organising framework. For instance, while Cambodia has six dimensions, Vietnam has “seven enabling actions” (MoET, 2006). Lao PDR calls its CFS efforts “Schools of Quality (SoQ)” – these have two main characteristics (child-seeking and child-centred) and are scaffolded on six dimensions similar to Cambodia’s (UNICEF, 2011a). In Thailand, CFS is not a national policy per se, but is an approach used in particularly disadvantaged provinces and locations and aspects of CFS are intentionally being mainstreamed into the national education system (such as child rights). It too has seven dimensions which are similar to Cambodia’s but has the additional aim of “monitoring, studies, evaluation” (UNICEF, 2009b).

32 The 28 countries in the EAPRO Region are: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Cook Islands, Fiji, Indonesia, Kiribati, South Korea, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Viet Nam.
CFS Comes to Cambodia

As detailed in Chapter Four, the quality of Cambodia’s formal education is inadequate, especially in rural areas. Attending school, even completing the full six years of basic education, is no guarantee of learning basic literacy and numeracy skills, much less higher order conceptual and critical thinking skills. While global enrolment aims for access to education are largely accomplished (with the glaring exception of gender parity in higher grades) there is enormous room for quality improvement at all levels, and continued emphasis on keeping girls in school through tertiary levels. CFS, with its comprehensive perspective, is widely regarded as a means of addressing all these challenges and one key way to operationalise Cambodia’s commitment to child rights.

The Child Friendly Schools approach was introduced to Cambodia through UNICEF in its 1996-2000 Development Plan. From 2001-2004, UNICEF/Sida funded a CFS pilot implemented by KAPE. Simultaneously, SCN engaged in parallel implementation of the concept with their own external funding. According to the MoEYS, these pilot efforts were implemented “in order to improve the quality of primary education, and highlight means to strengthen the rights of children” (MoEYS, 2005, p. 1). In addition to operating in different provinces, there were slight differences in programmatic emphasis. SCN focused on three dimensions (giving all children access to school, learning and teaching quality, and quality of life). UNICEF and KAPE organised according to four dimensions: psychosocial learning environment, inclusive and gender sensitive education, health and nutrition, parental and community engagement (MoEYS, 2005; I-P36; I-A15).

Based on the positive results of the KAPE initiative, in 2007 the MoEYS adopted CFS as a national model for the purpose of delivering quality education. Accordingly, MoEYS
produced a Child Friendly Schools Policy which detailed six dimensions for intervention. A national policy followed in December 2007. This policy was revised in early 2011 by a UNICEF-funded expatriate consultant and that draft is currently under review by the MoEYS (I-A14; I-A8). CFS was not intended *per se* to eradicate previous reforms, but many have been subsumed under CFS and there is on-going effort by the MoEYS to rationalise various elements of policies and dictates about primary education which preceded CFS (such as the curriculum policy).

Significant funds for CFS have been provided by UNICEF, who also provided technical support. The World Bank is another major contributor which assists by providing funding directly to MoEYS for implementation (through Cambodian Education Sector Support Project (CESSP) 1999-2004 and Fast-Track Initiative, 2010-2012).

**Historical antecedents: Cluster schools**

Devised as a way to share resources and to foster capacity building (Geeves & Bredenberg, 2005), the Cluster School system could be regarded as the philosophical precursor to CFS in Cambodia. In 1991 the Norwegian non-governmental agency Redd Barna began oversight of “cluster schools” in three provinces. The purpose of the Cluster school system was to facilitate sharing of mutual technical and material assistance to make the teaching-learning process more effective. In 1993, UNICEF cooperated with MoEYS to move toward an integrated national educational effort which necessitated systems reform; at this time UNICEF established a cluster school pilot in four provinces as a way of supporting capacity building of teachers (Dykstra & Kuchita, 1998, p. 3). At the end of the 2003-2004 academic year there were 939 Clusters comprising 6,063 primary schools across the country (Geeves & Bredenberg, 2005, p. 3). A cluster school is:
a grouping of 6–9 primary schools for administrative and educational purposes. It is an organisation of schools in the same vicinity or neighbouring villages which are grouped together for the benefit of sharing available resources such as teaching and learning materials, facilities and staff so that the access for all children and the educational quality of all schools within the cluster are improved. The model implies a degree of decentralisation and also permits strong local participation in decisions (emphasis mine). (Guideline for Cluster Schools issued by the MoEYS-appointed National Cluster School Committee, as cited in Dykstra & Kuchina, 1998, p. 4)

MoEYS tasked cluster schools with achieving four objectives, all related to improving system efficiency, but stated in terms of economic goals (sharing limited supplies and reducing travel time for trainings), pedagogic goals (increasing access to teaching specialists and limited resources), administration (streamlining communication and paperwork), and community participation (conscripting parents to mobilise children, monitor services, and help localise the curriculum) (Dykstra & Kuchina, 1998, p. 4-5).

The CFS strategy was never intended to replace cluster schools: rather CFS is implemented through the cluster system. “…cluster schools are used as the primary delivery system for most of the technical and financial assistance that is provided to individual schools. That is, clusters serve as the pipeline and the CFS approach as the water that runs through it” (KAPE, 2007a, p. 1).

CFS as one way to address “quality issues”

Emphasis on the quality of education, recognition that ensuring formal education is insufficient without attention to the quality and goodness of that education, really emerged on the global stage in 1990 with the World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO, Jomtien, Thailand) and attention to quality has steadily grown since then. The Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All (UNESCO, 2000) is also heavily laced with language relating to educational quality. For example, having recognised that “…the quality of learning and the
acquisition of human values and skills fall far short of the aspirations and needs of individuals and societies” and that in the decade between Jomtien and Dakar there was “a lack of attention to the quality of learning” three of the six goals explicitly reference quality (Section I, paragraph 4, emphasis mine) as demonstrated below in Table 16.

Table 16: References to quality in Dakar Framework for Action on EFA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dakar Framework for Action on EFA – 2000: quality-related goals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal 2</td>
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<td>Goal 4</td>
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<td>Goal 6</td>
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</table>

Further, this document states that “Starting from early childhood and extending throughout life, the learners of the twenty-first century will require access to high quality educational opportunities” (Section I, para. 8, emphasis mine) and that “While commitment to attaining universal enrolment is essential, improving and sustaining the quality of basic education is equally important in ensuring effective learning outcomes” (Section III, Goal 2, para. 33, emphasis mine).

In Cambodia, likewise, the year 2000 was a watershed for the education sector as focus shifted to include quality (Bredenberg & Heeyit, 2004; Bredenberg & Sao, 2003; Kitamura, 2008). The focus moved from nearly exclusive supply-side interventions to include attention to the demand-side of the educational equation, and donors and the MoEYS began (to require and to act upon) interventions to improve accountability (Bunlay et al., 2010; Tan, 2007). Significant effort by donors to increase efficiency through coordination was also initiated around this time (McNamara, 1999a). For multilaterals, coordination primarily takes the form
of the World Bank’s SWAP model for coordinated funding of the government’s plans that has resulted in support for (and influence on) different levels being divided up by donor (WB focuses on primary education, ADB on the upper-secondary level, and so forth) (Hirosato & Kitamura, 2009). For non-governmental organisations in Cambodia, NEP (NGO-Education Partnership), founded in 2001, acts as a coordinating body and quality-improvement facilitator; and EDUCAM acts as a clearing house for information about international NGO, bilateral, and multilateral efforts in the Cambodian education sector. Given the global emphasis on the quality imperative for education at the turn of the millennium, promoted by various donors in different ways, it is not surprising that the Cambodian government should actively become engaged with Child Friendly Schools.

Another major element of MoEYS’s roll out of CFS has been the production and dissemination of Khmer language and English versions of a CFS guidelines pact consisting of 14 books that address five of the six dimensions. These books are distinguished by their brightly coloured, shiny covers in vivid green, red, blue, and orange. Dimension 4, Gender Inclusiveness, is the only dimension without a dedicated guidebook. Some dimensions are covered in multiple books – for instance, Dimension 1 (Access) has one booklet with the self-explanatory title of School Enrolment Campaign (2008, No. 2423) and a second one called Household Mapping (2007, No. AYK-BS). The only books ever referenced at village/school level were the “red ones”. These address Dimension 2 (Effective Teaching and Learning) in three booklets: 1) Student-Centred Approach – Support Document for Application, Facilitator Manual (2007, No. 1882); 2) Student-Centred Approach - Support Document for Application, Teacher Logbook (2007, No. 1882), and 3) Helping Slow Learners (2008, No. 2423). These guidelines were gradually developed over a period of years by a (fluid) working group.
comprised of participants from Department of Primary Education, Teacher Training Department, Pedagogical Research Department, Provincial Education Department officials, UNICEF, SCN, and KAPE (MoEYS, 2005, p. iii; I-A4).

Early in the pilot process, in response to UNICEF/Sida requirements of empirical evidence of improved learning among children as a justification for future funding of the project, KAPE (Kampuchea Action for Primary Education) developed tests designed to test critical and creative thinking. The tests were administered to a control and experimental group and demonstrated that in many areas (but not all) students in the CFS conditions were acquiring the desired skills (such as higher order thinking skills) (Bredenberg & Heeyit, 2004). These tests were discontinued when funding expired. KAPE also conducted a statistically rigorous assessment of an 8-week “School Readiness Program” (SRPb) run under the CFS rubric (again comparing a control and experimental group) which concluded that SRPb does enhance children’s learning performance in core subject areas, particularly language-related skills (Nonoyama & Bredenberg, 2008).

While there has not yet been a quantitative analysis of the efficacy of the CFS approach in Cambodia, ex post facto Marshall (2008) used existing data from a World Bank student achievement test to compare CFS students and non-CFS students. The resulting report contained numerous caveats and highlighted the fact that two of three comparisons using different multivariate statistical analysis techniques showed no significant impact of CFS, while the third showed that CFS schools are having a significant positive impact on students (Marshall, 2008). He concludes that while these results are clearly frustrating from a policy perspective because there is not one definite set of “correct results,” that “the safest way to
...is to conclude that the statistical results are inconclusive, and the overall ‘flavour’ of the results suggests that CFS has not had an impact on student learning” (2008, p. 18).

**“Child Rights” in the Cambodia context**

Given the centrality of “child rights” to the CFS concept, it is crucial to understand Cambodia’s (theoretical and actual) view on “child rights.” Cambodia ratified the 54-article United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on October 15, 1992 without reservation. Within a year, the CRC has also been incorporated into the nation’s Constitution (1993), in various Articles. At the policy level, CRC principles are promoted, as well as reported on in the international arena by the Cambodian National Council for Children (CNCC – established in 1995): the CNCC’s priorities are outlined in a rolling 5-year National Action Plan for Children. Though progress has been made, by the Council’s own admission there is still significant work to be done to bring existing laws and practices into line with the provisions of the CRC. This is not surprising, given that implementing the CRC requires addressing an enormous range of issues: from smoking, to residential care shelters, to sexual exploitation. However, it is not just at the policy level that the gap between ‘theory” and “practice” remains. Perhaps even more importantly, prevailing knowledge and attitudes at the individual level about children contrast sharply with the international “child rights” agenda and discourse.

Children’s right to form their own opinions and to participate in family, community, and society is one of the key components of the CRC (Articles 12-17). Recent research conducted by a prominent child-rights NGO about values, beliefs, and cultural practices which affect child participation in Cambodia revealed that:

Children…are given few opportunities to express their opinions, make decisions or take action in their daily interactions. Respondents explained that adults were
unlikely to seek children’s opinions. Children seldom are involved in decisions about the issues that affect them. This was seen to be a result of cultural norms and poverty, which limited both the adult and the child’s freedom to choose and act. (Jordanwood, 2006, p. 5)

Jordanwood’s (2006) research highlighted numerous examples of values and beliefs which not only hinder child participation, but which can also cause harm to children, such as “a deep belief that children should always obey their elders, and should show them unquestioning respect….Children were expected to place filial respect above their own individual development, personal safety, and welfare…even if it caused them physical harm or danger” (p. 5).

In discussing child rights, it is important to understand that the CRC is popularly conceptualised in Cambodia as “four baskets of rights” (which necessarily include various CRC Articles), namely: survival, protection, development and participation (Gourley, 2009, p. 31). This schematic appears to mirror UNICEF’s reporting format (see, for instance, *Situation review of children in ASEAN, 2007*). However, understanding of what each basket includes is not consistent among NGOs that promote child rights, and is certainly not consistent among ordinary Cambodians.

This simplification of the complex CRC into four baskets seems to have happened soon after Cambodia signed the CRC…. It is good because it makes basic elements of “child rights” easy to remember; however, it is too simplistic and has the negative impact of reducing the comprehensive nature of the original CRC, and making the elements appear independent, rather than integrated. (I-A20).

The sharp contrast between theory and practice in implementation of the child rights agenda is also the conclusion of a recent research report about the uptake of CRC in Cambodia, entitled: *The Middle Way: Bridging the gap between Cambodian culture and children’s rights* (Gourley, 2009). The report sought information about the extent of “awareness of child rights.” When asked if they had ever heard the term “child rights” a full 32 percent of the
1,800 respondents in three provinces said no. When responses were disaggregated by location, 45 percent of respondents in Kampong Cham (the province in which the research for this dissertation occurred) said they’d never heard the term, contrasted with 25 percent in Phnom Penh (p. 32). In regard to specific rights, familiarity with the terms was in descending order: greatest for “protection” (57 percent), then “survival” (55 percent), next was “development” (45 percent) and least for “participation” (36 percent). Recognition for any specific right never exceeded 60 percent across total respondents in all locations (p. 32).

In regard to “attitude toward child rights,” a total of 13 percent of respondents said parents should keep their traditions, even those traditions that are in conflict with child rights because a) Khmer culture is good for children and b) if we give up Khmer traditions then children will not respect their parents (Gourley, 2009, p. 30). When asked if they felt “child rights” was appropriate for Cambodian culture, about ten percent said no (p. 29). Two reasons dominated: a) if children have too much freedom it will adversely affect their future and b) some rights are against Khmer culture. And, the 3 percent of respondents who felt that “child rights” were “not useful” also gave two primary reasons: a) it affects Khmer tradition and b) too much freedom will cause children to have bad behaviour (p. 29). More instances of local understanding/s of and appreciation for the concept of child rights are shown below in Table 17. These examples were selected as they potentially have a direct bearing on attitudes toward education, and specifically, critical elements of child-friendly schooling. In summary, then, the dominant socio-cultural landscape over which CFS has been set and continues to settle, is not necessarily conducive to or welcoming of “child-rights” as a major organising concept.
Table 17: Local understanding/s of "child rights" (from Gourley, 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understanding of “child rights” as indicated by response to hypothetical scenarios</th>
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<td><strong>Corporal punishment:</strong></td>
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| Fully 61 percent of respondents agreed that it is acceptable for a teacher to hit a child who does not do his/her homework and another 5 percent said that were not sure or did not know. By location, respondents in Phnom Penh were least likely to agree (48 percent), while those in Kampong Cham were most likely to agree (69 percent). That the majority of respondents who agreed said it was the student’s fault for being too lazy to complete homework indicates “that the prevailing cultural emphasis is on the responsibility of children to obey teachers rather than on teachers to address problems without using violence” (Gourley, 2009, p. 34).

“The next most common reason given was that the teacher was simply doing their job in wanting the child to be a good student, indicating that the tradition of allowing teachers to do whatever is necessary to teach students is still very strong in Cambodia and not perceived as a violation of children’s rights. In fact, key informants stated that in the past, when boys were taught by monks in local pagodas, parents would tell the monks, ‘we need only their skin and bones,’ a well-known saying indicating the approval of violence as a means to educate their children.” (Gourley, 2009, p. 34)

| **Gender equity**        |
| “A father and mother don’t allow their daughter enough time to study like their son because they make her do housework. Is this right or wrong?” A full 71 percent of respondents said they believe it is wrong to give daughters and sons unequal amounts of time to study because a) all children have equal right to study and b) girls should not be discriminated against. Among the 24 percent who said it was right that a daughter does not have equal time with a son for study because a) it is the girls’ job to do housework, b) the son needs to study more, and c) sons have/deserve more freedom. (Gourley, 2009, p. 41)

| **Diversity/ freedom of religion** |
| Another scenario posed for respondents was: “A father doesn’t allow his 16 year old son to go to a Christian church because he says it’s not Khmer religion. Is this right or wrong?” Under the CRC, the father’s behaviour is “wrong.” During the Middle Way research, however, 56 percent said it was right or they weren’t sure (43 percent = right; 13 percent not sure, did not know) while 44 percent said it was wrong (Gourley, 2009, p. 39).

How new is it?

As a holistic approach to education, CFS can be considered novel if compared to preceding educational reform initiatives. That is, it advocates for an approach that focuses on the child’s whole environment (physical, social, intellectual, psychological, spiritual) thereby moving educational development away from uni-dimensional projects that focus on only single
aspects of a the school environment (such as school health, classroom practice, etc). This led to the emergence of integrated programming (which was part of the rhetoric of earlier reforms, but not a result).

However, prior to its introduction, at least two critical elements of the CFS approach were already embedded in the education system, most obviously “student-centred learning” (SCL). The Ministry of Education has promoted SCL since 1995 when in the process of developing a new curriculum and textbooks it purposefully selected the student-centred approach to be the primary national teaching philosophy (Bunry, 2011). Bunry describes the “teacher centred approach” which SCL was to replace as one where the teacher is the central point of the classroom, teachers talk and children passively listen, students are supplied a great deal of information, but little opportunity to apply it, make it personal, or get feedback on their understanding (p. 3). In 1996, MOEYS cooperated with several bilateral donors to organise an orientation course on SCL for teachers and administrators; and in 1997, MoEYS issued a declaration requiring teachers to apply the student-centred approach in the learning and teaching process at all schools, and all levels within schools.

“Child rights” is another foundational aspect of the CFS approach that was a prominent feature of the socio-political and educational landscape even before SCL. For nearly two decades, primary school textbooks have included instruction about child rights; child rights have also been vigorously promoted by the RGC and civil society outside of the formal education system.

One dominant principle of CFS is “stakeholder engagement,” involvement of teachers and school administrators as well as parents and community members and students themselves in planning for a Child Friendly School and quality education. This concept of
“decentralisation” of authority (and resources) is not limited to the education sector, but is also part of the RGC’s wider political and economic reform strategy. Pellini suggests that the Commune Council elections in 2002 marked the beginning of decentralisation reforms, reforms which have three main objectives: to 1) promote democracy, good governance, equity of life; 2) give ordinary people greater opportunities to determine their future; and 3) encourage greater and sustainable development, especially the delivery of basic services (NCSC, 2005 cited in Pellini, 2007, p. 79).

In principle, then, authority for determining priorities should rest with the people at the school level because they know their own context and needs best. In practice, however, the highly centralised Education Ministry’s system is strongly top-down. “This is manifested in the low diversity in planning activities being implemented in schools; indeed, everyone appears to be doing exactly the same thing in many clusters, in line with a centrally driven agenda about what child friendliness means” (KAPE, 2007a, p. 21).

Clearly, CFS and some of its critical components have been institutionalised (policy-level): however, CFS has clearly not been fully internalised (practice-level). A recent evaluation of UNICEF’s work in Cambodia echoes the KAPE observations:

Guidance in CFS from MoEYS tends to be generalised and unidirectional rather than tailored and interactive. As such it has been weak in recognising and accommodating variability in school contexts and accounting for local level uncertainty as to the rationale of interventions and how to implant the steps. This is leading to adoption of new procedures with respect to school management and teaching, but without necessarily changing actual thinking and behaviour. (Bernard, 2008, p. 2)

Variations on CFS

There are at least two distinct versions of CFS being implemented in Cambodia, with variations dependent on the main implementing agency. This is not unique to Cambodia and
perhaps variance is to be expected given the dynamic nature of CFS; indeed, in many other countries, non-governmental agencies have loosely adopted a “child friendly” framework but do not subscribe to all of the elements or emphasis as laid out by UNICEF.

KAPE (2007) cites three fundamental aspects of its CFS philosophy (and implementation) as 1) child rights, 2) constructivist, and 3) cooperative learning. CFS was intended to not simply promote child rights, but to embody it:

An important rationale for [CFS approach] was to demonstrate practical applications of a child rights-based approach to development that would operationalise Cambodia’s adherence to the [UN-CRC]....also…to [go beyond] minimalist expectations for basic literacy and numeracy, leading to a strong focus on critical and creative thinking. (KAPE, 2007, p. 1)

Secondly, CFS as an approach to education is premised on “constructivism”, a theory of knowledge (not a particular pedagogy) which argues that humans generate knowledge and meaning from interaction between their real experiences and their ideas. In this scheme, teachers should be facilitators who elicit students’ knowledge and who enable peer learning so as to disrupt the formalistic, teacher-centred classroom environment (Vavrus, 2009).

The third distinctive of CFS is a heavy reliance on cooperative learning principles – children work together in teams, and help each other (KAPE, 2007). In addition to some difference in philosophical understanding, there are also practical differences in operations. KAPE, for instance, takes a “whole school” approach, preferring to pursue programming of depth rather than breadth and enabling management capacity to implement a wide range of CFS activities. To this end, KAPE utilises a voluntary approach to teacher training rather than making it compulsory for all teachers as mandatory training “erroneously assumes uniformly high levels of motivation among all teachers and a high receptivity to capacity building” (KAPE, 2007, p. 24). World Education and KAPE also utilise a “menu” approach to facilitate
school and community participation in devising locally sensitive CFS activities and environments – postulating that it is difficult for communities to know that other ways of doing things are possible if they have never seen alternatives. Thus the menu is meant to facilitate conversation and give people true options (World Education, 2011).

UNICEF takes an alternate view that all schools need some input, so it focuses more on breadth and reach of greater numbers of schools across the target areas. Save the Children and UNICEF work in a similar way, except that because it believes the funds to be unsustainable, SC does not utilise the “school grant” system which is supposed to enable schools to pursue what they define as priorities. The amount of money each school receives from the MoEYS is insufficient to implement even the minimum educational activities as prescribed in the national curriculum, much less to supply additional teaching materials and facilities.

**Current status of CFS in Cambodia**

As stated in the CFS policy, CFS is regarded by MoEYS as a means of achieving various preceding goals, plans, and targets including: the national education policy, MDGs, National Plan of Education for All, the national strategic plan for education (ESP) and the ESP’s annual rolling plan, the Education Sector Support Program (MoEYS, CFS Policy, 2007 p. 4). Currently, a draft of a revised policy for CFS (funded by UNICEF, written by a Canadian consultant) awaits approval within the MOEYS. In an effort toward “integration” of policies and aims, UNICEF contracted the same consultant to simultaneously produce a draft curriculum development policy for general education. This draft too awaits review and approval by MoEYS.

As of the 2012-2013 school year, CFS was estimated by one official in the Teacher Training Department to actually be functioning in 80 percent of schools, although he was
vague about what actually distinguished a CFS from a non-CFS school. There are no published figures showing how many schools the MoEYS considers to be officially child-friendly. From a government perspective, the gap appears to have a primarily material dimension (Saoyuth, 2011), which is in keeping with the RGC’s tendency toward using “poverty” to explain all social ills and deficits in government services. From a more analytical perspective, it is obvious that the gap also has geographic or spatial dimension, as schools located in remote areas with no NGO presence were identified as less likely to be CFS then schools in urban or easily accessed rural areas. However, even in the accessible rural Cluster where this research occurred, the Director of one of the Cluster’s ten member schools informed the RT that his school was not CFS “because we have had no training.” Thus there may also be a difference in definition between what the central level considers officially CFS and how schools consider their status themselves.

The non-governmental organisations that initially piloted the CFS approach (Save the Children, KAPE/World Education) are still actively engaged with it, though geographic locations and particular emphases have shifted over time. One major shift for KAPE, for example, is that CFS is now being promoted by MoEYS for application beyond primary level to lower secondary (grades 7-9), so KAPE/World Education has been very active with MoEYS in preparing related documentation for the additional grades. The British Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), Save the Children International (SC), and UNICEF all have agreements with MoEYS to provide technical support for CFS in six provinces each. Additionally, numerous other smaller local and international NGOs are involved in working with individual schools around specific education-related projects. Although not necessarily explicitly branded as CFS projects, all activities must, of course, correlate with the RGC’s CFS policy.
Perhaps as a tacit expression of satisfaction with CFS, in 2011 the Ministry of
Education began work to expand the CFS approach to lower secondary (grades 7-9). This has
necessitated inclusion of 16 lessons into the teacher training programme but “otherwise
nothing is different. We have to edit some documents but really it is the same for primary
school and lower secondary” (I-A9).

**Overview: CFS in One Rural Primary School**

Implementation of Child Friendly Schools varies from country to country; there is also
variation of CFS within countries, depending upon such variables as location (rural schools
typically look quite different from urban schools), local understanding of the concept, and
supportiveness of school administrators. This section provides an overview of the rural context
within which most students and schools in Cambodia are situated, and then specifically details
Sala Phum school’s history and facilities before concluding with a quantitative description of
students and staff. It is clear that “education” is not implemented despite social, economic,
religious, political, and cultural context but rather, within (and perhaps a direct result of) such a
context, and with the added complexity of multiple actors and agendas.

**On location: Rural life**

Subsistence agriculture remains the primary livelihood for the majority of Cambodians
today; and the overwhelming majority of Cambodians live in rural areas. While business is
booming and modern amenities and goods abound in urban centres, most Cambodians still do
not have electricity or running water in their homes and villages; most are unable to afford
modern healthcare; and the majority are chronically malnourished.
While much has been made of teacher attitudes and low capacity as barriers to delivering good quality education in Cambodia (CITF Survey, 2011; Knight & McLeod, 2004; VSO & NEP, 2008;), far less attention has been given to the reality of barriers to “effective teaching and learning” inherent in rural Cambodian life, and the urgent need to begin incorporating that reality into planning rather than simply lamenting it. For instance, although it is widely recognised that subsistence agriculture (and rice production specifically) dominates rural life, this fact is not accommodated in the annual school calendar. Parental demand for labour thus prevents many children from attending school during the most intense periods of planting and harvest (both of which occur during the official school calendar). In practical terms, too, realities such as a lack of electricity make it very difficult for teachers to use evenings to prepare lessons and for students to complete homework. Several teachers (students too?) at Sala Phum have impaired vision, indicated by their tendency to stand near the windows or the door, slant the book toward the light, and hold their books at arm’s length in order to read. This would be easily correctible with eye-glasses. However, the visit to an optometrist and then the purchase of spectacles are regarded as a luxury, as “unaffordable.”

Lack of childcare options detracts from the learning environment as administrators and teachers must sometimes bring their infants or children to the classroom, and students must sometimes bring younger siblings to school with them. And, inadequate and inaccessible healthcare results in significant absenteeism by teachers for personal illness, or to care for family members. Both of these situations cause disruption in the classroom and divert attention from the educational enterprise.

Teachers are blamed for double-jobbing, although all stakeholders recognise that this is almost inevitable as a teaching salary is inadequate to support a family. The Cambodian
Independent Teachers’ Federation suggests the figure of $250/month as the minimum for a living wage; currently primary school teachers earn about $60/month. The displacement of energy into a second (or third) occupation also has the impact of reducing time, energy, motivation, and concentration necessary for preparing/teaching. As an example, the male teacher in our host family generated necessary cash by fishing (his wife sold the fish in the market). As night was optimal for this activity, he usually left the house mid-afternoon and did not return until about 6:00 am, just in time to take a shower and get to school by 7:00 am.

**History and physical facilities**

Sala Phum School was established in Phum Daem Chev in 1953, and settled on its current site in 1982. It is a government primary school, providing kindergarten through grade 6 education for a catchment area of four villages. It is part of the Seksa Cluster, along with nine other schools; and lies within S’rok Tnouit District which contains a total of 58 primary schools. According to the MoEYS 3-category Child Friendly Schools grading system, Sala Phum and 18 other schools in S’rok Tnouit rank in the highest tier (*apiwhot* = developed); 12/58 schools are considered *machume* or medium; and 15/58 are rated “basic”.

Sala Phum has attracted significant international donor attention and resourcing over the past decade. As was one of the original KAPE CFS pilot schools it received technical and material assistance from 2001-2009. The school has a dedicated library room stocked with books donated by the international NGO Room to Read, which also provided training for the librarian. And, for several years the school has benefited from the World Food Program (WFP) School Breakfast Program supplies (rice, oil, canned fish, pulses) sufficient to feed the entire student body every school day; this food assistance will continue through 2015.
The school grounds straddle the main road running through Phum Beye village. On one side stands the school’s flag-pole, two concrete classroom blocks (five classrooms each), three wells (one not functioning, one with brackish water, a new one with clean water), a thatch kitchen building, a now defunct fish pond, a 2-stall toilet block, three concrete benches set beneath a large spreading tree, and a broken concrete slide and set of swings. Across the road, the school compound contains a single rectangular concrete classroom block (five rooms), the school garden (they grow only trakuen, a spinach-like vegetable used in the school breakfast), a 2-stall toilet block, one well, a concrete and thatch gazebo, and a set of wood and bamboo stalls where women sell snacks daily. This second compound also contains a copse of eucalyptus trees. The Director reported that one of the classroom blocks was funded by an international donor (Bridge NGO); and that some of the school’s other facilities (both toilet blocks, two wells, gates and fencing; kitchen utensils) were funded by “big people” (m new thom thom), that is, wealthy individuals who have historic ties with the village or school.

Both compounds are partially encircled by walls/fencing material and have lockable metal entrance gates. The School Committee is currently raising funds to complete fence construction. A large concrete “Buddha statue” was being constructed near the flag-pole at the time of field-work; it was initiated and funded by an elderly widow from Phum Beye who now lives in Siem Reap. “She is really devout. She understands clearly about Buddhism. Since her husband and her child died, one child is living but has mental problems; so she sees her sad life and then she follows Buddha” (I-P53). There is no public electrical system in Phum Beye village, so the school has no electricity.
**Number and ages of students**

The total number of students enrolled at Sala Phum Primary School in grades 1-6 at the time of research was 321 (168 girls, 52 percent of all students, were female). The Vice Director indicated that for the past five years the number of students has been steadily decreasing, a phenomenon he attributed to an aggressive family planning campaign by an international agency. All staff stated that there are no eligible children in the school’s catchment area who are not enrolled; further, they indicated that the student body includes two children with disabilities (both with sight problems) (I-P56). These children are reportedly seated close to the front of the classroom so that they can better see. No mention was made of other types of disabilities as requiring special attention (such as cognitive impairment, mental health issues, or chronic illness that affects motor skills, such as cerebral palsy).

Cambodia’s official starting age for Grade 1 is stipulated as 70 months (which equals 5.8 years of age, or nearly six years old. Thus the official “correct age” for a Grade 4 student is ~10 years; for Grade 5 student it is ~11 years old; and students should be ~12 years old in Grade 6 (as highlighted in Table 18 below). Just under half of all children registered in Grades 4-6 at Sala Phum are officially over-age (74/158 or 46.8 percent): there are slightly more boys than girls who are over-age for their particular grade. Each class also has a few under-age students. Note that in Cambodia, it is not uncommon for older people, and rural dwellers, to be uncertain about the day and/month and/or year of their birth (month is most commonly known, as per the Khmer zodiac). Traditionally, Cambodians state their age as a year older than a Westerner born on the same date, as Khmer consider themselves one year old at birth. This factor was accounted for by asking students for the year of their birth.
The total number of over-age students in Grade 4 is 22/49 or 44.8 percent of that class (6/22, or 27.2 percent of all over-age students in Grade 4 are female). For Grade 5, the total number of “over-age students” is 24/49 or 48.9 percent (11/24 are female, or 45.8 percent of total). And the total number of “overage students” for Grade 6 is 28/60 or 46.6 percent (12/28 are female, or 42.8 percent of the total number of over-age in Grade 6). Details about the ages of school children in Sala Phum are summarised in Table 18 below.

### Table 18: Ages of school children at Sala Phum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Year born</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total no.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 (A+B)</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘correct age’</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Grade 4 students</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 (A+B)</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘correct age’</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Grade 5 students</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 (A+B)</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘correct age’</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Grade 6 students</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Number of staff

Eighteen staff work at Sala Phum Primary School. Of these, two (kindergarten teachers) are supported by the community rather than the MoEYS. This total is comprised of four administrative staff and 14 teaching staff. All staff originate from the local environs (either Phum Beye or a nearby village). Of the 18 staff, 12 are female. All three full-time
administrators are male (Director, Vice Director, Secretary); the full-time librarian is female; three of the 14 teachers are male (one teaches a grade 6 class, both grade 5 class teachers are male). In addition, two local women ‘volunteer’ to cook each school-day for the WFP-sponsored breakfast program. These women receive in-kind remuneration of 15 kg. of rice per month. Compared to many other rural Cambodian schools Sala Phum has an enviably low student-teacher ratio.

**Paying for school in Sala Phum**

Parents associated with Sala Phum Primary School estimated that on average they must spend about 50,000 riel (~ USD $12.50) per child per year for school-related costs. This figure did not include transport – most children walked or rode bicycles to school, or were dropped off from a motorcycle ride with older relatives. Neither did it include what educational economists call “indirect costs” (or “opportunity costs,” that is, the income a family must forgo when a child who could otherwise be earning income, attends school (Bray & Bunly, 2007, p. 1)). The single biggest expenditure was for purchase of the mandatory nationally prescribed school uniform (blue shorts and white button-down, short-sleeved shirt for boys and a navy blue pinafore dress with similar shirt, though often sporting a different style of collar, for girls) – estimated at 20,000 riel (~ USD $5) per uniform. Very poor families pass a uniform among their children, or require a child to wear the same uniform for multiple years. Many families said they cannot afford shoes, so although that is also an official requirement, footwear were not included in the calculations of school costs. The number of notebooks reported as purchased per year per student ranged from 12 to 20: depending upon the number of pages in each book, the average cost ranges from 1,000-2,500 riel (~ USD 0.25 – 0.63). At the low end, this totals USD $3/year per child (12 notebooks costing 0.25 each), and at the high end is USD
$12.60 (20 notebooks costing 0.63 each. On average, the cost can be assumed at around USD $5-7/year. Pens, pencils, and a ruler were estimated to cost around $2-$4/year.

Students are not required to pay for textbooks. Parents confirmed that they did not usually pay for these. However, when new textbooks are issued by the MoEYS, teachers habitually cover them with plastic to preserve them; and then pass the cost of the simple covers on to their students. A few students reported paying teachers a small amount of money for single sheets of A4 paper when the teacher handed those out to a class. And, of course, the vast majority of students observed spent cash daily to purchase simple snacks.

Only a small number of students at Sala Phum primary attend (and pay for) supplementary rien kuar (tutoring) lessons, which costs about 200-300 riel per hour (USD $0.05 – 0.075). No students or parents reported paying any money for exams now that there is no longer a national exam administered in Grade 6. However, all said that they will/do pay for taking national exams at least in Grade 9 and Grade 12, as well as paying (so-called “informal fees) for other exams as required. All school-related costs, formal and informal, increase as students progress through the formal education system. While USD $12.50 may not sound like a major expense, for poor and rural families with multiple children it is often difficult to muster this amount of cash. This is reportedly one reason why so many Cambodian children do not study beyond the primary level\footnote{The national survival rate of children for Grade 1-6 for 2006-2007 SY was 52.5 percent (UNESCO, 2010, p. 22-23). Survival rate for Grade 1-9 for the same period was 29.3 percent (p. 23). Survival rate for Grade 1-12 during the period 1996-2008 was just 11 percent (p. 23).} and why relatively few families educate all of their children even through the primary level.
A Typical Day at Sala Phum Primary School

This section provides a brief description of a “typical school day” and events at Sala Phum primary school, beginning from before children arrive at school and continuing through the end of the school day at 11:00 am. It also describes the official class schedule, break-time activities, attendance issues, implementation of occasional classes, and special events.

**Chores before school:** All student respondents indicated that they are responsible for completing chores at home before going to school. Boys and girls both said they were responsible to tidy up their own sleeping area and tie up mosquito nets and bedding. Both genders also reported sweeping the compound as a chore. Girls reported doing a wider variety of chores including cleaning inside the house, carrying water, cooking rice, washing clothes, feeding younger siblings, and so forth. No boys said they swept or cleaned inside the house. A few boys said that they occasionally wash their own clothes, but for all girls this was a common task and more girls then boys cited this as a task they did for other household members and not just themselves. Boys exclusively were tasked with care (feeding) of livestock. A couple of boys indicated that they cared for younger siblings by reading to them sometimes after school – again, this was distinct from girls’ response as girls said they regularly cared for younger siblings, both before school and after school.

**School breakfast:** The first people to arrive every school morning at Sala Phum Primary School are the two women responsible for cooking breakfast; they arrive about 4 am. SPPS receives food from WFP, sufficient to feed the entire student body, about 320 children. At many other schools, there is no breakfast at all, or it is provided to a limited number of children, based roughly on a “poverty” assessment. The two major assumptions underlying the
breakfast programme is that many Cambodians are too poor/have insufficient food to feed their children, and that the food will contribute to overall academic retention and achievement.

Students begin arriving about 6 am; soon after, breakfast is served by class. Students carry large pans of rice and soup from the thatch kitchen to the porch in front of their classroom: students bring their own plates and spoons. After eating, students rinse their own dishes at one of the two water pumps on the school grounds, and designated students from each class carry left-over food back to the kitchen. The cooks take left-over food home to feed livestock; and each cook receives 15 kg. of rice per month. As per WFP requirements, children are weighed and measured once each semester and the weight/height information posted on the classroom wall. However, this information is neither analysed nor compared over time.

**National anthem:** Every school day begins with all students assembling outside around the flagpole. This occurs roughly at 7 am (+/- 15 minutes). Students stand together by class and in single-sex rows to sing the first verse of the Cambodian national anthem as designated students hoist the Cambodian flag. Next, the Director gives a short exhortation to students. At Sala Phum, the Director most often instructed children to keep the school yard clean of litter; park their bicycles neatly; beware of traffic on the roads; and occasionally he would speak about HIV/AIDS and methods of transmission. After the Director’s speech, students are formally dismissed.

**Cleaning yard/classrooms:** After being dismissed, students go to their respective classrooms and begin sweeping and cleaning; some students remain outside to pick up rubbish in the school yard, cut grass, gather leaves, water flowers or the school vegetable patch, and fill toilet cisterns. This takes about 15-25 minutes. Once this is completed, students line up outside their classroom doors, in single-file, single-sex columns. The class leader, a child
appointed by the teacher and usually the child with the highest academic ranking, ensures the lines are straight and then admits students to the classroom. Some classes had two child leaders, one boy and one girl – another explicit effort to “do gender.”

**Class schedule:** For this primary school, the schedule remains the same every day, and throughout the school year, though in some schools it varies. Classes taught, regardless of grade, are in this order: Khmer language, math, and social science/applied (natural) science (see Table 21 for official course schedule and instructional hours). The librarian reported that each class is scheduled to use the library for one hour every two weeks; students are also able to (and do) drop-in during break time, if class is cancelled, and occasionally when the teacher gives them free time. The librarian indicated that the library is also open to the public; but that “very few” community members come and even less actually borrow materials.

Very occasionally students engage in a physical education class, which for this school consists of students standing in rows outside their classroom to perform a very basic callisthenics routine. The Director reported that in the past, this school taught a life skills class, but that this stopped after NGO financial support ceased because the PAP funding was insufficient for covering costs. Some Sala Phum students do attend extra-curricular English language classes taught in Phum Beye village by one teacher from the nearby Seksa Cluster High School.

**Electricity:** Like most schools in rural Cambodia, Sala Phum had no electricity and no computers. On cloudy days the classrooms were quite dark, making it difficult to see printed materials well.

**Playground activities:** The two recess periods are typified by a noisy and active school yard. More boys than girls use the time for rowdy activities. Usually, play is sex-
differentiated. Boys and girls rarely play together – rather, they function in same-sex groups and there is a clear difference in games that each plays: for instance, girls play rubber band jump rope; boys play marbles. For more details on the games that children play, by sex, see Chapter 7.

**Snack time:** at recess time, many children flock to the snack sellers who are seated in thatch shelters on one of the two school compounds. All sellers are women. They offer seasonal produce (such as raw green mango, roasted sweet potato, boiled corn, river clams), fried rice flour balls and fried bananas, simple sandwiches (sardines on baguette), and a range of packaged snacks (potato chips, dried durian chips, candies, chewing gum, etc.). Some of the packaged snacks and candies are in the form of cigarettes or guns. Prices range from 100 - 400 riels per item (0.025 - 0.10): most children spend at least 200 riels (0.05) a day on snacks.

**Attendance:** On average, five students were absent from each class observed throughout the research period. This rough average was arrived at by simply calculating number of students absent in 22 of the observed class periods (from February through July). In the 22 classes, only two had full attendance; the largest number absent from a single class was just over half (13/24). The most common reasons were for sickness or to help parents. See Table 19 below for details.

**Instructional hours:** At Sala Phum Primary School, during the research period students lost at least half hour per day in late start time and early class closure. Additionally, teachers were frequently absent for personal business or illness and administrators sometimes stretched official holidays by 1-2 days. Taken together with a high rate of student absence, these incursions amounted to significant erosion of already limited instructional time.
Table 19: Average student attendance during fieldwork

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date (2011)</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>No. present</th>
<th>% of total present</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 February</td>
<td>1A</td>
<td>25/27</td>
<td>92.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 February</td>
<td>2A</td>
<td>24/27</td>
<td>88.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 February</td>
<td>4B</td>
<td>24/24</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 February</td>
<td>4A</td>
<td>21/23</td>
<td>91.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 February</td>
<td>5A</td>
<td>22/22</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 February</td>
<td>5B</td>
<td>21/25</td>
<td>84 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 February</td>
<td>6A</td>
<td>25/29</td>
<td>86.2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 February</td>
<td>6B</td>
<td>29/32</td>
<td>90.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 February</td>
<td>3B</td>
<td>23/30</td>
<td>76.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 February</td>
<td>5A</td>
<td>15/22</td>
<td>68.1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 March</td>
<td>4B</td>
<td>20/24</td>
<td>83.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 March</td>
<td>4B</td>
<td>21/24</td>
<td>87.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 March</td>
<td>5B</td>
<td>21/25</td>
<td>84 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 March</td>
<td>6B</td>
<td>23/32</td>
<td>71.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 May</td>
<td>4A</td>
<td>18/25</td>
<td>72 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 May</td>
<td>4A</td>
<td>20/25</td>
<td>80 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 May</td>
<td>4A</td>
<td>18/25</td>
<td>72 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 May</td>
<td>4B</td>
<td>23/24</td>
<td>95.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 July</td>
<td>5A</td>
<td>11/24</td>
<td>45.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 July</td>
<td>5B</td>
<td>14/25</td>
<td>56 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Thursdays are special days:** Teachers explained that Thursdays were formerly designated as a day for “labour” (*provah*) when all students would work to clean school yards or construct buildings. More recently, in order to increase the number of instructional hours Thursdays are now designated as teaching days but reserved for special activities such as teaching life-skills or helping slow learners. The fourth Thursday of the month designated as a Technical Day when teachers meet for lesson planning and technical upgrading (students have a holiday). During the research period, two of the Thursday Technical Days were cancelled due to insufficient funds, and both teachers and students had the day off.

KAPE indicated that policy was/is different than SPPS practice. For at least two decades, Thursdays were supposed to be technical upgrading days, set aside to upgrade teachers’ skills, but in fact were often used as a day-off or to clean up the schoolyard. So more
recently, according to KAPE, MOEYS now uses the day for “life-skills training” with special emphasis on language and maths (neither of which are technically life skills, but that is how the Ministry describes it) with a single Thursday each month used as a Technical Day in the original sense of technical upgrading.

**Rien kuar elementary style:** Three of the six teachers of grades 4-6 reported that they teach “extra tutorial classes” (*rien kuar*). Students pay 200 or 300 riel per hour to attend. Teachers use the same textbooks and methods as in their regular classes. Teachers reported that parents send their children in order to “make them learn more.” It is usually high-achieving children who participate, not those who are considered “slow learners.”

**Special events:** International Children’s Day is one good example of how centralised the education system is in Cambodia. The MoEYS sends out a letter each year to inform schools that not only they are required to celebrate International Children's Day, but they are also to follow a specific agenda as laid out by the MoEYS. For instance, point 2 in the 2010 instructional letter stated: “Sport and Education office in every district and city/town must motivate students in cleaning school, classrooms, and public roads for half-day before the International Children’s Day to join and pray for the day of freedom of children." Sala Phum Primary School did not follow the entire agenda, because, according to the Director, they had insufficient funds. The Director reportedly used PB (MoEYS) funds to hire out the music speakers and DJ for the morning of dance organised for children.

**Teacher Profile – Sala Phum**

Given Cambodia’s turbulent recent history, particularly the protracted civil war which spanned a 35-year period, from the mid-1960s to 1990, it is vital to be aware of the life histories of school staff, and to identify the era in which current teachers were born, grew up,
received their own basic formal education, and were qualified to teach. There are distinct
differences observable between teachers conscripted to teach in the 1980s, considered qualified
simply because they were literate; and teachers attending a 2-year course at Teacher Training
College after completing a Grade 12 diploma. Not just the teacher’s training made a difference
– age too often signifies a different outlook on life and approach to teaching. Pedagogical
practice seems largely to reflect a teacher’s own experience with grade school; thus, older
teachers, who were teenagers or older during the Khmer Rouge era, for instance, tend to be
much less comfortable with group work than do teachers in their mid-20s (not yet born during
the KR era). In sum, then, to really understand the educational enterprise as it is enacted in
contemporary Cambodia, one must have a clear picture of just who is tasked with “educating”
as this may illuminate the form that educating takes.

This section begins by highlighting the impact that war and trauma, and variations in
training, may have on Cambodian teachers. Then it describes teacher perspectives on changes
in the education system over time, contrasting “now” with a generic “then”, and on the concept
of “educational quality.” Next is a brief description of some elements of teaching practice. The
section ends with attention to teacher aspirations for their students, and recording a general
lament about the moral decline evident in Cambodia’s children and youth.

**Issue of trauma and training**

At Sala Phum, the ages of the 18 teachers/administrators range from the oldest at 58
years down to the youngest of 26 years: five are in their 50s, nine in their 40s, two in their 30s,
and two are in their 20s. 34 This means that just three out of 18 school staff were born after the
infamous Pol Pot regime; the majority of staff, the ten born in the 1960s and 1970s, ranged in

34 Pol Pot was ousted in January 1979 – only three of the 12 school staff were born after Pol Pot time; those born
in the 1960s and 1970s (10 staff) ranged in age 3-7 years at the time of the Khmer Route takeover.
age 3-7 years when Pol Pot took power; and after surviving that brutal regime, would have been age 7-12 years at the start of the ensuing decade, which commenced with a tattered national education system. The five oldest staff members would have been raised and completed some primary education during a period of relative stability under postcolonial Sihanouk’s Sangkum Reastr Niyum (People's Socialist Community – 1953-1970). Every teacher and administrator at Sala Phum interviewed during this research indicated that some of their family members had been killed during the Khmer Rouge era.

All teachers/staff received their pedagogical training after Pol Pot (that is, post-1980): five of the teachers have a grade 9 completion certification and seven teachers have completed a grade 12 certificate. In some cases, it could hardly be considered to constitute real training – starting in 1980 and continuing through that decade, people with some ability to read, and some experience as students, were conscripted to become teachers. They received very brief training; often this entailed simply exposing them to primary school textbook content, and then deployed to teach. One respondent from Royal University of Phnom Penh described the results as, “For 3-4 years after Pol Pot, teachers forced knowledge into children” (I-P67). Sala Phum staff represent eight different Teacher Training College (TTC) cohorts (plus two unknown), ranging from cohorts 4-24.\textsuperscript{35} The entrance requirements under which Sala Phum staff were admitted to TTC ranged from 7+1 (one teacher) to the current system of 12+2 (three teachers). A significant majority of teachers (14) were admitted under the 8+1 scheme. No administrators or teachers have achieved beyond grade 12 certification, though one teacher (female, grade 1) is currently studying for a bachelor’s degree (BA).

Two main points are significant for this research. First, in a recent publication which highlights barriers to learning capacity development for Cambodians as individuals and a

\textsuperscript{35} Specifically, two studied in generation (cohort) 4; 2/gen. 5; 4/gen. 7; 4/gen. 11; one each in cohort 6, 16, 21, 24.
nation, Pearson (2011, p. 25) asserts that “the psychosocial legacy of complex war-created trauma… combines with aspects of Cambodian culture to inhibit both individuals and society from achieving their full potential.” The author further notes that there has been no large-scale systematic or comprehensive attempt to address the negative psychosocial impact of Cambodia’s history and that the “life goes on” response which characterises Cambodia may mean that “these patterns of behaviour are almost certainly masking many residual and unresolved impacts of the trauma” (2011, p. 41), many of which affect a person’s motivation and ability to learn. The second implication important to recognise is that the majority of teachers received their own primary/secondary education, and basic teacher training, during a tumultuous decade as Cambodia struggled to restore basic human, physical, and technical infrastructure. While all have had subsequent in-service training, their educational history was not intentionally accounted for. Some, or many, may simply not have had sufficient education themselves to understand, much less apply, subsequent instruction; or may be deficient in content knowledge, a factor which obviously impacts their ability teach.

The broad, holistic, and flexible nature of the CFS concept makes it suitable for application in emergencies and crisis situations (chronic conflict contexts, post-conflict settings (like Cambodia), locations affected by natural disasters). UNICEF actively promotes CFS standards in these kinds of difficult situations through its EEPCT (Education in Emergencies and Post-Crisis Transitions) initiative; and indeed, all its education programming (UNICEF, 2011b, p. 28). Teacher training under EECPT includes stress and trauma management (for teachers themselves) and instruction for teachers on how to support traumatised children (a

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36 The first-ever national Mental Health Survey was conducted in late 2011, under the auspices of the Department of Psychology, RUPP with technical and funding assistance from GIZ, Maryknoll, and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and collaboration from multiple expatriate professionals/experts and the Ministry of Health. Results have not yet been published or disseminated.
major component of which is to refer them to psychosocial care professionals). Analyses of results tend to be stated in terms of hardware: amount of infrastructure built, quantity of materials/supplies provided, numbers of teachers trained, percentage of schools with peace-related topics included on the curriculum, and so forth. By contrast, learning outcomes are seldom mentioned, though when they are, invariably the results for conflict locations are lower than for non-conflict affected zones. Furthermore, in post-conflict settings, and situations where long-term chronic poverty rather than armed conflict is a major cause of stress and trauma, the trauma-focused dimension apparent in EECPT is not likely to be implemented because officials do not believe their contexts warrants it. This is certainly the case in Cambodia where trauma is not mentioned in a single MoEYS document.

**Perceptions of effective teaching/quality education**

When asked to describe differences in education “before and now”, respondents cited three distinct periods: Sihanouk era (with French influence – 1950s-1960s); the decade immediately after Khmer Rouge regime was ousted (1980-1993); and the current time (2000-2012). Overall, the quality of primary education available now is regarded as superior to education offered in the post-Pol Pot decade, but the quality is seen to be rather inferior to what was implemented during the Sihanouk period. Some differences are conceptual, while others are material. And it appears that in many cases the perceived difference may be much greater than actual difference. Some major points of contrast as expressed by research participants relating to teacher status and behaviour, student behaviour in the classroom, access to education, and educational standards, are described in Table 20 below.
Table 20: Summary of respondents’ contrasting educational practice over time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major points of contrast between “then” and “now”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Status and behaviour of teachers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Formerly teachers were rich and powerful.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Previously, teachers were much more demanding of their students; teachers enforced higher standards.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Teachers had much more respect from community and society in general; teachers were not only respected, but were feared by students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Parents and caregivers observed that “teachers today don’t care as much as before; they are distracted and they have to work because the salary is low.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom materials and textbooks</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In recent years, significantly more materials have been made available from the MoEYS to teachers and students: “Now, everyone has their own textbook. Before we have to copy all from the board.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student behaviour in the classroom</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Students are described as “more brave”; “brave enough to ask questions.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- On the other hand, students today are also seen to be less respectful (quote: used to shake when they saw a teacher, but now they can bump into them and the students are not afraid);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- “Children have more rights than before.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Morale demise of youth generally (not specific to school), and declining morality, is lamented by most adult stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access to education</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Previously, there were fewer students, because many did not enrol, or dropped out, due to fear of teachers and punishment, could not cope with the hard work, or failed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Now, everyone can come to school. This means that many students are “not smart” and “don’t pay attention.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In former times, there were fewer girls in school than today.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Previously, education was more competitive</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Students were afraid that others would know more than them; so they tried very hard! Parents and caregivers contrasted this with “students now are not so serious; they can’t remember as well as students before them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In former era, education was more merit based – teachers were not afraid to fail students, and did not pass students up to a new grade unless they passed exams.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers and administrators also responded vociferously about differences in teaching methods and pedagogical styles. In the previous era teaching methods were described as being “teacher-centred,” that is: teachers write, students copy; or “before we just went to class and repeated after teacher” (I-P32; I-P64). This was contrasted with the current (“modern”) practice of “student centred learning” where “students are more active than teacher.” As one
Grade 6 teachers explained: “The teacher was talkative before but now sometimes the teacher is supposed to talk less than the students. We encourage students to talk more than teacher” (I-P71). A second pedagogical difference is that formerly teachers emphasised individual work, and cooperative or group study was never done. “No group activity, just focus on individual (ask individuals, individuals answer for themselves).” A third pedagogical practice that varies is, “Before teaching was not ‘tangible’ (no materials, no pictures to show).” And a fourth pedagogical practice contrasted by respondents was “Before, we learn by hearing; we memorise.” One teacher said: “Before, we learned by heart; you were punished if you didn’t learn the material” (I-P67). Unlike opinions voiced about SCL and group work, respondents were ambivalent about memorisation, some decrying the fact that “Students now must use Casio [calculator]! Before, we know all!” (I-P33)

Pedagogical practices are largely dictated from the central MoEYS via teacher training colleges, as well as through teacher guidebooks and student textbooks, rather than being deliberate choices by teachers. There seems to be some discomfort now with the relatively “open-ended” nature of education. As one teacher complained, “Students can draw whatever they want now, they don’t have to learn to draw a pumpkin like I did before [that is: a specific picture, with step-by-step instructions] (I-P65).

Teachers hold strong ideas about classroom management, discipline and strictness. There was unanimous consensus that formerly, teachers were much stricter, and this was seen as positive because it led to better results. Current teachers said that when they were students, students were punished for not knowing the answers or not being able to do lessons as demanded by teachers. Punishment/discipline most often took the form of [violent] corporal punishment. Examples provided by the teachers from their own childhood experiences
included: hitting students on the back or the head with rattan sticks, pinching or twisting ears, striking fingertips with thin bamboo rods, kneeling on jackfruit peel, and making students run laps around the school yard. Some responses from teachers about their perception of the effectiveness of the physical punishment which characterised their school years, included:

- “I understand due to their strictness!”
- “Teachers gave punishment because they wanted us to know!”
- “Final result was good.”
- “If no hitting, the students would not be good in study.”

No stakeholder group suggested that corporal punishment has actually been eradicated, though all knew that there were “laws and policies against it.” As one caregiver FGD stated:

“Teachers still hit students but not so strong and hit only someone who knows absolutely nothing. Not as strong as colony time” (P14, FGD).

**Educational quality**

One final observation about teachers’ view of “quality education” needs stating. Among rural education stakeholders, “quality” is frequently equated with “access”. That is, people recognise that more children can/do attend school and this is then regarded as equivalent to qualitative improvement in education. Simultaneously, however, teachers also attribute the presence of many so-called “slow learners” in their classrooms to the fact that “now everyone can go to school,” even those who do not take education seriously or those who are not smart. So paradoxically, the quality explicitly associated with access is actually seen as being undermined by the breadth of that access. Further, the quality of students is seen as being superior in previous eras; “before they pay attention [now they do not].” Few teachers took responsibility for poor quality, rather they implicitly assigned responsibility to those in
positions of power within the Ministry of Education, and to general moral decline facilitated by external influences.

One teacher’s reflection on what comprises “quality” education showed the contrast between his own idea and his perception of an official definition of quality (I-P67):

Now, all children are collected to go to school. Talking about effectiveness, it is hard to say because in previous time we didn’t force them to study, they study if they want to. But now we must collect all to go to school, including children who are small at age 6, so it seems too crowded in the classroom and the children do not understand well. But, MoEYS considers quality as having high percentage of attendance.

**Teacher practices**

Teaching behaviours and practice is central to the Child Friendly school approach. However, several key aspects of ”good practice” are either limited or missing entirely in the research focus school, including class preparation, use of external reference materials, consistent teacher presence, and time spent teaching whether for private or administratively-sanctioned activities. By their own admission, very few teachers actually prepare in advance for teaching, but rather may only review the day’s lessons a few minutes before class starts. Reasons given for this included: “too busy making income,” “too tired,” and “too difficult because we have no light at night to read.” Also, several teachers explained that it is not necessary to prepare because they have been teaching the subject for a long time already so they already know the content.

Regardless of subject, content directly from the textbook dominates class time. Teachers seldom incorporate additional information or otherwise deviate from the teacher/textbook. Little effort appears to be made to localise, expand, or extend the curriculum content. One teacher reportedly used a book from the library occasionally, when she was required to teach about flags of various countries “because I don’t know other flags” (Grade 3
Another indicated that for teaching Khmer language, he consistently referred to a MoEYS manual for long distance education produced in 1998, because he did not think the current textbook explanations were as good as in previous textbooks (I-P67). When asked if they do any research, or incorporate non-textbook information, several teachers said they do refer to a Khmer dictionary if they are uncertain about the meaning of a word.

Most teachers reported that because their salary is insufficient to support a family, they have three jobs: in addition to teaching and seasonal farm labour which most engage in, they often have a third income-generating job as well. For some, this consists of running rien kuar or extra tuition classes after school hours. For male teachers, “double-jobbing” frequently takes the form of earning income by means of driving a motorcycle taxi. Several female teachers said that they “sell small things near the house.” Some female teachers reported that they bring their own infants to class “because there is no one at home to look after them” (I-P15; O-P82). Clearly, income and family responsibilities take first priority for the rural teachers participating in this study, so in the event of any conflict, school responsibilities are given short shrift.

Teacher-initiated cancellation of individual classes was observed frequently. The main reasons given by teachers for cancelling classes were illness (their own, or a sick family member they had to attend to), celebrations (weddings, funerals), and “busy” (including taking their own children to sit for standardised high school exams; and at a cluster school, in March 2012, four out of six teachers were absent reportedly for three days in order to sit the Grade 12 exam themselves). At Sala Phum, occasionally an unofficial day-off was declared by the Director if a school day fell between holidays because “it is too difficult to come in between.” In May, all classes were cancelled by the Director on two different days due to heavy rain.
There was also the phenomenon of so-called “small holidays” where several days off (as much as two weeks, or 12 school days) were added to a national holiday (e.g. Khmer New Year).

Another displacement of class time occurs when (both) students and teachers are (occasionally) conscripted to provide manual labour for school-related purposes, but during regular school hours. For example, several male students at Sala Seksa were required during school hours to help dismantle the tents erected for International Children’s Day Celebration. Also at Sala Phum, on one school day the researchers observed two male teachers and the Director up to their elbows in concrete, making fence posts to erect around the school. Again, this was being done during class-time.

**Teacher aspirations for students**

Teachers at Sala Phum tend to describe their primary goal/s and desires for students in terms of “attitude” and “character development,” more often (and more readily) than in terms of “knowledge” or specific skills or abilities. This was summed up neatly by a female teacher as “We want them to be good and want them to know!” Key characteristics that teachers deemed important were: good morality, cooperation among students, gentleness, love and respect for parents, knowing right from wrong, diligence in study, and “sweet conversation” (using polite and proper words and pleasing intonation to speak with elders).

When they did indicate knowledge-related goals they desired to inculcate in their students, they specified reading, giving ideas, critical thinking, and knowing enough to get a job when they are older. As regards specific skills they wished to impart, they expressed following school rules, literacy, and life-skills. Teachers also identified as a desirable skill, being/becoming a “good friend, good child, good student” (*mek la’ah, khone la’ah, suh la’ah*). Overall, the picture is one of care and concern about the childrens' holistic well-being and their
moral/character development. This is as or more important than the development of particular skills, including critical thinking skills or inculcation of technical knowledge.

**Moral demise of youth**

That “children in the past were good, not like now” was a frequent unsolicited lament voiced by various adult stakeholder groups in this study, i.e. MoEYS and NGO staff, caregivers and parents, teachers and administrators. This bad behaviour, stated in terms of “loss of morality” was said to be typically characterised by rudeness; tendency to play rather than pay attention in school; failure to know right from wrong; lack of gentleness; disrespect for elders, for teachers outside of class, and even for teachers in class [subtext: because the teachers cannot be strict enough]. Moral demise is widely regarded as having been caused by media and “foreign influences” like television, movies, and digital pornography; and by having “bad friends.”

**School Administration in Sala Phum**

Though administration is clearly a key aspect of the formal education enterprise, management and administration of local schools is not addressed *per se* in the Ministry’s set of CFS guidelines. Some discreet administrative tasks are included in the manuals – such as implementing a school enrolment campaign, organising a student council, conducting a periodic school self-assessment. This lack of formalised attention hints at a systemic understanding of CFS as specific activities (“what”) and belies the fact that CFS is more accurately described as an approach (“how”): very little has changed within the MoEYS as a result of its adoption of CFS as national policy. This omission suggests that there is limited
appreciation for the fact that school administration provides an environment which is more (or less) conducive to the practice of child-friendly principles.

This section provides an overview of how management and administration are actually undertaken at Sala Phum Primary School, including scheduling (annual and weekly) and theoretical/actual contact time; displaying information in the office; budgeting; reporting; monitoring and evaluation of teachers and the school; and supporting teachers. In addition, the “extra-curricular” school management, features of child participation and community engagement are also addressed as these are goals in the national CFS framework.

Schedule: annual, weekly

The official Cambodian school year runs October through June. During September, as part of Cambodia’s Education For All (EFA) and CFS commitments, many schools campaign for enrolment and registration. School begins on 1st October officially. The school year ends in July. Policy states that the school year is to end in late July, but in practice many rural schools finish on or before the 15th of July because many students are absent anyway, helping their family in the rice fields before this date. What is more, the MoEYS year-end reporting requirements truncate study time too. In order to comply with the requirement for submitting final (year-end) grades to the Core School in time for review and then onward submission to the Provincial Office of Education (PoE), some rural schools stop classes a full month earlier than the official date of 30 July.

Officially Sala Phum Primary School closes its doors on the 15th of July “because students are all helping in the rice fields and no one comes to class.” But in reality, the 2010-2011 school-year finished on the 20th of June because of Cluster/MoEYS requirements that all final grades/reports be in by that date. After that, date, all class-time was spent in review, and
no new materials were used because the students “are not responsible to know it” (that is, they won’t be tested). This represents deletion of nearly 30 school days from the official calendar.

While the number of hours per subject per week, and number of school days per week, is dictated by the central MoEYS, observation of various schools in the Seksa cluster suggests that individual schools take some liberty with organising the actual order of a school day. Table 21 below illustrates the official day’s schedule at Sala Phum. Schools are mandated to run six days per week, four hours per day (7:00–11:00 am, Monday to Saturday). At Sala Phum, there were a sufficient number of teachers and classrooms, so the school did not hold a second shift – many rural schools, and some in Laveah Cluster, continue to run two shifts per day to accommodate large numbers of children. All teachers were, therefore, free of classroom responsibilities every afternoon.

Table 21: Sala Phum Primary School- official daily schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Class/activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:00 – 6:45 am</td>
<td>45 min.</td>
<td>WFP breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:00 am</td>
<td>10 min.</td>
<td>Flag raising and national anthem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:10 - 8:30</td>
<td>1 hr., 20 min.</td>
<td>Khmer language class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30 – 8:45</td>
<td>15 min.</td>
<td>Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:45 – 9:30</td>
<td>45 min.</td>
<td>Mathematics class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30 – 9:45</td>
<td>15 min.</td>
<td>Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:45 – 11:00</td>
<td>1 hr., 15 min.</td>
<td>Social science class (includes art, science, history,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>culture, government, HIV/AIDS).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasional</td>
<td></td>
<td>Physical education class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasional</td>
<td></td>
<td>Life skills class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Traditionally, Thursdays were set aside for labour, with all students and teachers required to contribute time and labour for cleaning or repairing school grounds and facilities. Shortly after liberation in the early 1980s, the Education Ministry allocated the day for ongoing capacity building for teachers as the quality of teaching was so low post-KR period, and
children were still required to do labour around the school. About five years ago, this on-going capacity building was discontinued in favour of dedicating a single day per month, the fourth Thursday of each month, as “Thursday Staff Development Day” (TSDD) (I-A17). This event is usually held at the Core School, though it can rotate through the other school locations as well. Theoretically, teachers are supposed to attend this “in-service peer training” event in the afternoon so that they can teach in the morning/s and not detract from contact hours. In practice, this was a day-off for students, as teachers met in the morning. The other Thursdays in a month also differed from the usual daily schedule – in several primary schools in Seksa Cluster, teachers described it as ‘review day” for “slow learners”. The Sala Phum Director reported that it is also the day to teach life-skills classes; however no such classes were conducted at Sala Phum during the period of research “because there is no money.”

**Contact time**

The global average for “contact time” (defined as the number of hours teacher and students spend together in a classroom) for primary schools is about 900 hours per year (Courtney, 2008; UNICEF 2009c, Ch. 5, p. 25). Official policy in Cambodia specifies 855 hours of contact time per year. See Table 22 for details on the official break-down of instructional hours. Curriculum policy was in the process of being revised by a UNICEF-funded foreign consultant in late 2011. Major changes to the primary curriculum were reported to be mandatory English language instruction starting in Grade 4; mandatory life skills training of two hours per week; and a shift in methodology for teaching reading, from the method *globale* (whole language) to *Chyk Chyme* (phonetics).
Table 22: MoEYS policy on weekly instructional hours for primary school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Total Hrs</th>
<th>Percent of time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Khmer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Science &amp; Social Science</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Social Science</td>
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<td>Science</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Foreign language</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Physical ed. &amp; Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Physical ed. &amp; Sport and Health</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Life skill</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>180</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Foreign language and science only for grade 5 + 6 and only those schools that can run these program by using the life skill time on Thursday of first, second and third weeks of month.

During this research actual class-time at the research site was observed to be about 18 hours per week (4.5 hours less than policy) or 684 hours per year assuming a full 38-week year (also unlikely in Cambodia) – see Table 23 for details. At the primary research site, on most days class started about 15 minutes late; and students were released from their last class period 10-15 minutes early. Multiplied by six days each week, this represents the loss of more than a full hour per week due to “slippage”. In some schools, Thursdays are designated as “review days” to accommodate slow learners. This day, lessons already completed during the week are reviewed; while this practice may be useful for slow learners, it is obviously redundant for average or high achieving student/s, a group that comprises more than half the student body.
Table 23: Actual contact time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Amt. of time</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:00 – 7:20</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
<td>Flag raising, national anthem, lecture from Director, clean school yard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:20 – 8:30</td>
<td>70 minutes</td>
<td>First class period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30–8:45</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
<td>First break.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:45 – 9:30</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>Second class period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30—9:45</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
<td>Second break.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:45- 10:50</td>
<td>65 minutes</td>
<td>Third class period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45/50-11:00</td>
<td>10-15 minutes</td>
<td>Few classes continue until 11:00 am, most of them are shuttered and locked well before.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, Cambodian children fare poorly against the global average of 900 instructional hours per year. One reason for the discrepancy between theoretical and actual classroom time is that due to traditional shortage of facilities (physical infrastructure, as well as human resources), children attend schools for a half-day in Cambodia, a maximum of four hours per day and six days per week. There is ample evidence to suggest that much of the class time for students in government schools in Cambodia is neither actually instructional, nor effective (NEP, 2005).

Table 24 below provides a snapshot of reasons given by teachers at SPPS and Seksa Cluster schools for cancellation of classes.

Table 24: Rationale for lost contact/teaching time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rationale for “lost time” and teacher absence</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal reasons</td>
<td>Teacher was “busy.” Teacher “had a meeting.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family obligations</td>
<td>Teacher had to go to Vietnam to house-sit for a relative and was gone 10 days. Teachers took their own children to sit the national grade 12 exam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sickness / ill health / death</td>
<td>Teacher was “sick.” Funeral and then 7-day ceremony after funeral.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>Teacher is studying for a BA in the provincial capital, and her classes are on weekends, so she cannot teach Saturday morning class; her students refuse to study under the other teacher. Teachers without grade 12 certificate went to the provincial capital to take this test (3 days).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Rationale for “lost time” and teacher absence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weather / environment</td>
<td>• Heavy rains.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended official holiday</td>
<td>• A school day fell between two holidays, so Director opted to give teachers an extra day off.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Budgeting**

Individual schools have little/no influence in their own budgeting and administration. For instance, a rural school’s detailed annual budget, including seven line items and amount per line item, is dictated by higher authorities (I-P73). The Sala Phum school director summarised: “We cannot decide about money. We must report according to the line they give us” (I-P56). Administrators at this school transparently reported that because the MoEYS cannot fully understand what individual schools need, they sometimes use their allocated funds for items not included on the centrally-prescribed budget, but that they nevertheless report as having spent against the prescribed budget. The Sala Phum Vice Director, tasked with financial reporting, mentioned that another difficulty with RGC funding was that it was frequently late, or did not arrive at all. He knew the total sum their school was to receive (80,000 riel, or $20, four times per year) but reported that in the previous academic year they received just two instalments; and none so far in the current year (I-P73). The Director said that the MoEYS is supposed to provide 7,000 riel/year/primary school student (~$1.75) and 15,000/year (~$2.75) for secondary school students.

The Director reported that sometimes he personally takes a loan (cash or in-kind) from local business/es to purchase items for the school, and this is not necessarily guaranteed to be repaid with MoEYS funds but may be (re)paid with funds raised from the local community. “I owe the store 40,000 riel [~ USD $10] for the gate. My goal is that I want to make a fence around the school; and the School Committee says it will help with this” (I-P53). In addition to funding from the RGC, and funds raised from the local community by the School...
Committee, wealthy benefactors have paid for several buildings and facilities at Sala Phum (see section above “History and facilities”).

Though Sala Phum Primary School teachers were aware of something called “PB” (“Priority Budget”), none had ever been involved in a budgeting process at this or any other school. One teacher indicated that the Director informed teachers annually of how much money their school was to receive, but that she didn’t remember the figure. Occasionally teachers requested supplies from the school office or Director: “Sometimes we get what we ask for, but not immediately. It always takes time.” (I-P61; I-P85)

**Reporting to MoEYS**

Administrators spend significant time fulfilling MoEYS requirements for information. Annually, the following three reports are due from a primary school to the Cluster/MoEYS:

1) Registration (how many students registered, no necessarily attending, by sex);
2) End of semester 1 (stating each student’s grades for the semester, statistics on numbers of classroom and buildings used, etc.); and
3) Final year report (this includes all the information of the end-of-semester-1 report plus end-of-semester-2 results; a mix of reporting on grades, failure, drop-out; teacher and administrator statistics; and infrastructure).

All these reports are done on official forms, the original versions of which appear to have been photocopied multiple times rendering some headings virtually illegible. Information required on the forms was not always straight-forward because individual schools use a Cluster-level form, or schools report against a Province-level form. In other words, providing statistics to the centre is the key organising factor, rather than gathering, collating, analysing, and applying what information is useful to individual school/s. One could imagine, for example, that schools would benefit from tracking over time such information as drop-out rates and pass/fail rates, student attendance (seasonality), teacher attendance (reasonale), teacher performance
(change over time), topics covered at monthly technical meetings, and so forth. At Sala Phum, administrators keep copies of what is submitted to the Cluster office, but do not track or hold any additional information or independent records. The Director also indicated that he does not refer to their copies of submitted reports but merely files them in a locked cabinet.

The reports required by MoEYS are almost exclusively numeric and statistical, not relating to quality, an emphasis which does not reflect well the aspiration to be child friendly. There are some exceptions – for example, schools are asked to report whether or not they are CFS according to the MoEYS scale. And there are some qualitative components of CFS (such as community involvement) reported against; however, even in this, the forms seek to capture numeric rather than qualitative information and may thereby contribute further to obfuscation of the real intent of being child friendly. For instance, “community involvement,” according to the reporting form, is defined as the amount of money given to a school.

A review of the 2010-2011 Final Report from Sala Phum Primary School revealed several inaccuracies within the report, relating to numbers of teachers/administrators and numbers of student who have failed. In some instances, it was clear that the policy requirement, rather than reality, was captured in the report – for instance, the number of hours of class-time for each subject was reported as the prescribed number of hours rather than actual hours. It was not possible to ascertain if these errors are intentional (done for the purpose of casting the school in a more favourable light) or if they are “honest mistakes.” Additionally, sometimes numbers are rounded up, sometimes rounded down. While this may cause no problem at a very low level, as one goes up the ladder, then these errors are compounded and the resulting consolidated numbers will, of course, not be particularly accurate. When errors
such as those made by Sala Phum are multiplied by thousands of schools across the country, this casts doubt about the accuracy and validity of consolidated figures reported by EMIS.

**Cluster school monitoring system**

According to CFS policy, monitoring visits from the DoE/Cluster School are to occur once each semester. The monitors are “high quality” teachers/administrators from the Cluster; called a DTMT (District Training and Monitoring Team). This team has received some training from MoEYS in the use of monitoring checklists which are contained in one of the CFS guidebooks called *Roles and tasks of District Training and Monitoring Teams*. DTMT use two checklists: one for individual teachers (*Child Friendly Teacher Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Checklist*) and one for the school as a whole (*Child Friendly School Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Checklist*). The checklists are such that the monitors record “yes” or “no” for each indicator; there is no option for variations such as partial achievement. This focus and format would appear to be both an indication as well as result of the Khmer preoccupation with being “right” or “correct action”. It takes a half day (which is actually one entire school day) for the monitoring team to complete its assessment. Teachers at Sala Phum indicated that during monitoring visits, DTMT members usually stay in their classroom for less than an hour.

Monitors give the school Director completed assessment forms for individual teachers, as well as a compiled report sheet which summarises the scores of all teachers (shown in Table 25 below). The Sala Phum Director produced a copy of performance checklists for five teachers that were completed in February 2011. However, he did not have the overall school performance report available to give researchers as this was taken by the monitoring team.
Table 25: Compilation record of individual teacher performance assessment/s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Teacher name</th>
<th>Sex (M/F)</th>
<th>Gr. taught</th>
<th>Class Management</th>
<th>Teaching and learning</th>
<th>Grand total</th>
<th>Final grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nitteeh A</td>
<td>Nitteeh A</td>
<td>Nitteeh B</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This system of “supervision” has obvious limitations. One is that the Director is responsible to talk to teachers about their performance, rather than the monitors themselves doing it directly. Given the short amount of time DTMT officials spend on site, it is unlikely that they have a comprehensive discussion with the Director about individual teacher performance which implies that the Director must rely solely on the numeric information on the score-card. A second limitation is that emphasis appears to be on arriving at a cumulative grade for teachers - there is no effort made by the DTMT to highlight certain overall trends in teacher performance at a school. For instance, it might be useful to highlight the fact that at Sala Phum, one area that all teachers were deficient in was accommodating weak students. This could, conceivably, be a topic/issue for a future professional development day.

MoEYS has added an additional layer of indicators to the 79 already stipulated in the CFS Teacher Performance Checklist, for a total of 343 individual indicators. All indicators are given equal weight in calculation of a final score. Despite repeated attempts, researchers were unable to obtain actual records of school performance assessment completed by the DTMT, though they were informed that schools in the Seksa Cluster were “above average” in implementation of CFS. Though impressively elaborate, this CFS monitoring system may be largely ineffectual because it “measures the wrong things” (Courtney, 2008). In other words, a teacher can get an excellent score against the MoEYS checklist, or a school can be rated in the

37 It is difficult to state a precise English word for the Khmer term used here, nitteeh. The noun nitteeh is defined by Headley as: “mention, citation; explanation, analysis, clarification.” Perhaps ‘score’ might be an appropriate rough English equivalent for this context.
top tier, and still not be philosophically, fundamentally operating in a “child friendly” manner. Indeed, many indicators deal strictly with physical or material reality (i.e. pictures on a wall, presence of toilet blocks, cleanliness of classrooms). Rendered thus in logical framework technical terminology, this effectively serves to keep attention on “outputs” (what can be counted) rather than “outcomes” (behaviour, knowledge, and skills changed). Indicators on the Teacher Performance Checklist relating to teaching and learning are all activity-focused and the majority refer to teacher actions, though arguably student learning should be the ultimate test of effective teaching. Two examples will suffice to illustrate this: 1) Teacher reminds and provides students with instruction before any activities; and 2) Teacher uses memory, comprehension and critical thinking questions in every lesson. Indicators about student action or behaviour include the following three, among numerous others: 1) Students complete activities in groups in the classroom; 2) Poor learners are able to work with outstanding ones; 3) Boys and girls work together. Not one indicator addresses “quality” and none address “learning” or “comprehension” by students. In summary, reporting is almost exclusively activity-based and about appearance more than about the intangible aspects of teaching and learning.

According to KAPE, Sala Phum is “developed” which is the highest possible ranking according to CFS policy. Teachers themselves, however, said they were not aware of the ranking system or of SPPS’s “grade” on that scale; and though they sometimes host visitors interested in observing CFS in action, they did not actually know why their school was considered child friendly.

In addition to regular monitoring conducted by the DTMT, MoEYS has included a book of guidelines for school self assessment as part of the CFS packet of guidebooks. These
guidelines state as their target audience, numerous stakeholders including school Directors, Deputy Directors, and teachers; School Support Committee members, students, community members; inspectors at provincial or municipal departments of education; district offices of education; and school clusters. The guidelines state that monitoring and consultation are to be done of classrooms and the school more generally, and to involve parents, students, and teachers. To date, Sala Phum Primary School has not utilised the self-assessment forms.

**Support and regulation of teachers**

Teachers have, and take advantage of, opportunities for informal interaction with one another during the two scheduled breaks in a school day. The Director indicated that all staff (teachers and administrators) has a regular monthly meeting around the 30th of each month “to talk about problems with students” (I-P56). This contradicted teachers’ assertions that they very seldom meet altogether, do not meet regularly, and that they have minimal opportunity for collaboration as a group. A Grade 4 teacher at Sala Phum explained that teachers all meet altogether when the Director calls a meeting, but that happens rarely (*yu yu m’dong*, literally, once in a long time). When they do meet, according to this teacher, the usual purpose is for the Director to disseminate information from MoEYS; teachers do not actually engage in much dialogue or discussion.

When asked if the Director and/or administrators of Sala Phum had ever “given them support,” teachers overwhelmingly responded in the negative. The lone exception to this was a report from one teacher that she had once received 70,000 *riel* by surprise, because her colleagues at the school had voted her the “best teacher”. Teachers did report that they occasionally seek, and sometimes receive, assistance from their peers. This happened most often between teachers of the same grade and most commonly around lesson content or exam
preparation. The only variation on this was one Grade 5 teacher who reported that sometimes other teachers ask him questions about how to manage a classroom or how to teach a particular topic or point, and that he is happy to talk with and show them what he knows. However, none of that teacher’s colleagues reported seeking assistance from a particular teacher.

The Director’s view of teachers in his school was frequently expressed as a complaint rather than as an appreciative or supportive statement about issues or challenges that may affect a teacher’s attitude or performance. Also, although he is in a line of direct authority over teachers, the Director took no responsibility for teacher actions or behaviour (I-P52), explaining:

Based on my idea [classroom management] is better [in the student-centred era], but it also depends on teachers. If teachers try hard, it is easy to teach. In contrast, if teacher are lazy it is difficult. The students are also affected by the teaching too. If teachers are strict and good in teaching, the students are also good. But, as I have observed, normally teachers are careless so the students have not so good behaviour. In fact, in my school, discipline is low.

Later, when asked to define what skills and attitudes characterise a “good teacher” the Director implicitly expressed a sense of powerlessness in regard to regulating teachers, blaming this on the system:

Talking about the attitude [of teachers], I don’t know how to answer. Mmm… how to have good attitudes. Like I said, the first [factor that affects attitude] is low salary; second [factor] is lack of regulation [vik nay]. They don’t have the regulation over them…in the past period of Sangkum when I was a student, the regulating of teachers was so strict. Teachers would not allow the students to pass to the next class, if not good. If not a good [student] then they cannot pass the grade…. Sometimes, if they don’t complete their work, they also have no chance to pass. And if teachers did not listen to their seniors [may] they would be changed to work in another place. But now it’s impossible. Teachers don’t have a good attitude [aria-boht]. Even they take leave or don’t complete their work, the seniors [those in positions of authority] could only call them to discuss then advise them to try to complete. So, I can do only that, with no discipline [vik nay] over them. (I-P52)
Overall, then, the relationship between teachers and administrative staff at Sala Phum appears to be a mutually uneasy alliance, sporting a harmonious surface that belies underlying frustrations. Teachers feel insufficiently recognised for their hard work and commitment and desire positive affirmation from superiors, as well as organised constructive and collective professional engagement; administration blames teachers for having bad attitudes and offering low quality education.

**Information displayed in school office**

All school offices visited during the course of this research had their walls plastered with hand-written posters and charts, including a significant amount of statistical information about their specific school. Below, Table 26 provides details about the kind of information posted on Sala Phum office walls. However, closer scrutiny of a typical school office suggests that little use is actually made of materials and information. For instance, all offices had displayed a map of their school catchment area showing houses and citing population figures, however, these were outdated.

Other information commonly featured on office walls included varied types of statistics, charts, and tables reportedly developed as part of in-service training event/s – details are listed in the table below. All of these were at least one year out-of-date; and when asked, administrators were unable to suggest possible ways that the information could be use comparatively over time.
Table 26: Information displayed on SPPS office walls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Record of information and statistics displayed SPPS Office walls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community map</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Not dated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Completed as part of KAPE-initiated “community mapping exercise” for school enrolment campaign.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Statistics</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Number and sex of Sala Phum Scholarship students 2010-2011.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sala Phum Student Census 2010-2011 (age and grade).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. List of Sala Phum Teachers Names (and details about education level).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sala Phum School catchment area – total population in detail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Councils and committees</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are a number of posters showing the structure of various “Councils” or “Committees” as outlined in the CFS guideline booklets. However, it was not clear how many of these actually function and to what extent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Competition Council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Education Council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Evaluation Committee of Staff Performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. “Get all children to school” Committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Girl Student Consultation Team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Hygiene &amp; Environment Committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. School Committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Staff Policy Council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Technical Council Team.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Community engagement**

According to the CFS policy, each school in Cambodia is supposed to have a formally organised Parent-Teacher Committee (alternatively called a “School Committee”). The School Committee is supposed to meet with school administrators and teachers three times each year: October (to register children), February (Planning meeting), and June (budgeting). The Sala Phum Director clarified that “Parents are allowed to come but they don’t often come; maybe one or two for each meeting.” Rather, these meetings are regularly attended by the Village Chief, pagoda representatives, monks, and formal community leaders. This is not surprising, given that the implicit purpose of the committee is primarily to raise funds for the school.

When the research team met with the “School Committee” for Sala Phum, they were informed that the Parent-Teacher committee has been folded up into a more generic “School
Committee”. Several members of this Committee do not have any children attending Sala Phum. Further, this committee indicated that they previously had one female representative among their members, but she is not a current member. This is interesting in light of the fact that during the parents’ FGD, predominantly women attended because “the men are too busy.”

**Child participation**

According to the CFS guidebook for “Dimension 5: Participation by children, families and community – Student Councils,” there is supposed to be one Student Council (an Executive and Branch Committees) per school. “Student Councils are developed to mobilise the involvement of children at their schools, regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender and status in various activities so that…” and then six intended results are listed. In the case of Sala Phum Primary School, this Committee was theoretical rather than actual, as evidenced by the presence of a structural chart on the office wall but lack of awareness about the existence of the committee on the part of most students interviewed; and admission by the School Director that “the Committee exists but it does not function because we have a weak teacher in charge” (I-P53). Further, according to the Director, the major responsibilities of the Committee were to ensure that students “don’t get into bad gangs, clean the school yard, lead other students to study, and collect money for poor students” (I-P53).

The other component of “Participation for children, families and communities” included in the guidebook is student portfolios. These are defined as “a collection of a student’s work and assignments, gathered in order to reflect the evolution of the student’s learning” and to “enable parents and community to share [children’s] education-related experiences” (MoEYS, 2008d, p. 1). Children at Sala Phum did not produce such portfolios, although in most classrooms teachers had posted examples of student work on the back wall.
It appears that at Sala Phum “child participation” is conceptualised almost exclusively in terms of these specialised committees, rather than seen as an integral part of CFS. This local understanding runs contrary to child rights generally (“participation” is one specifically named component), and specifically to CFS’s second dimension of teaching and learning which is supposed to make child participation central to classroom and learning activity.

**Curriculum and Courses**

Officially, the current Cambodian primary school curriculum includes five different subjects: Khmer language, mathematics, social science, physical education, and life skills. In practice, many schools do not run a life skills class unless they receive external funding for that; and, as observed during the field-work period, physical education class occurs very sporadically and consists of a brief period of basic callisthenics and stretches. In addition, Sala Phum does not have any electricity, there are no computers in the school,38 and there are no foreign languages taught here because no teacher has capacity to teach a foreign language.

This section begins by outlining the development of Cambodia’s primary school grade composition and major shifts in the curriculum since 1979. Then it provides an analysis of the current curriculum and textbook materials in terms of how “local” (indigenous) it is, and how “child friendly” it is.

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38 Estimates on internet penetration vary widely for Cambodia, ranging from 0.5 percent (retrieved July, 2012 from [http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia/kh.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia/kh.htm)) to 1.26 percent (International Telecommunications Union, retrieved July 2012 from [http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/publications/world/world.html](http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/publications/world/world.html)). According to ITU Cambodia was ranked 140/182 nations reported on). The highest figure reported was 3.1 percent by R. Pain in his article “A disconcerting silence in Cambodia,” Asia Times online, retrieved August 17, 2012 from [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/NH16Af01.html#.UCzG2JXvcos.email](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/NH16Af01.html#.UCzG2JXvcos.email). Regardless of variation, the figure is still extremely low. The number of Internet users in Cambodia was last reported at 178,142 in 2010 (World Bank report released in 2011). This is up from 74,082 in 2009; which was up from 70,495 in 2008. According to the World Bank, Internet users are simply people with access to the worldwide network, no quality or duration is specified (retrieved July 2012 from [http://www.tradingeconomics.com/cambodia/internet-users-wb-data.html](http://www.tradingeconomics.com/cambodia/internet-users-wb-data.html)).
Curriculum evolution

With each different government comes an alteration of the curriculum to match the political priorities of governing authorities and the practical realities of international assistance. Since 1979, the Ministry of Education’s structure has been modified three times (February 1979; February 1980; June 2009); and the system of grade levels and national examinations has changed three times (1979-1986 primary was four years of a total of ten years of basic education; 1986-1996 a fifth year was added to primary level; and in 1996 the current system was put into effect – 6 years primary education, 3 years lower secondary, and 3 years upper secondary for a total of 12 years of general education). The national teacher training formula has changed four times (1987-1984 = 8+1; 1984-1989 = 11+1; 1999-2004 = 12+1; 2004-current = 12+2 and 9+2 for remote schools) (MoEYS brochure, nd).

Around 1986, “human rights” was added to the curriculum – through the influence of UNICEF it is first introduced as an explicit subject in late primary school textbooks, and continues to be addressed through the high school level curriculum. The former head of the Pedagogical Research Institute explained that the current primary school curricula and syllabi were developed in 2006, “mostly a group of local experts did it, not foreigners.” She added that, “we have local subject experts, but there are not many Cambodian curriculum experts. So, we had help from Thailand and Philippines on syllabus” (I-P39). At times, the source of such assistance is glaringly obvious, as when stories or text are drawn straight from the advisor’s national textbooks.

HIV/AIDS is another relatively recent educational priority and addition to the national curriculum in Cambodia. The School Health Department (SHD) was established under MoEYS in 1996 and tasked with promoting education about HIV/AIDS, reproductive health,
and disease relating to tobacco and diarrhoea. By 1998, MoEYS had produced learning and teaching material for secondary schools, a resource package based on material produced by UNAIDS, WHO, and UNESCO. At primary level, MoEYS with the assistance of UNESCO and UNFPA, produced a guide for teachers based upon an existing UNAIDS package customised to Cambodia.

In 2006, with funding from the Government of Japan, UNICEF launched a campaign against avian flu in Cambodia and other countries in the region. This included developing a curriculum for use in schools, as well as promoting vaccinations, a mass media campaign, and training “influenza advocates” in major religious institutions (wats and churches). Though the threat of this pandemic appears to have subsided if not been completely extinguished, this topic remains etched in the national primary school curriculum.

Donors also directly add topics and their own pedagogical emphasis to the curriculum. How this occurs seems to be ad hoc and dependent upon more relationships than rationale, methodical policy implementation; in some cases it results from a donor’s insertion of technical advisors into the Ministry. For instance, “improving the quality of math and science education” has been a Japanese International Cooperation Association (JICA) priority for several years. This has taken the form of assisting the MoEYS in revising the curriculum and developing textbooks and teachers’ manuals for upper secondary level math, physics, chemistry, and biology (I-P40). In addition, when asked about the process of developing and changing national curricula, a high ranking official in the Teacher Training Department explained, “For some subjects like Science, VVOB [a Belgian NGO] in Kandal [province] cooperates to train our teachers and develop many documents that we incorporated into our science curriculum” (I-P40).
In 2009, World Vision Cambodia (WV-C) received official approval from MoEYS to include its *Peace Road* curriculum into the national education system. In WV-C’s words (2009):

> Peace Road for Children Curriculum is an educational tool which can be used to strengthen children and youths as peace builders in their communities. The 420-page book contains six chapters that include: learning about ourselves, learning about diversity, lessons on gender equity, having fun without offending or harming anyone, good relationship and safety, and peace building.

In addition, the German international aid agency (GIZ) is currently considering a roll-out through MoEYS of its *Young People’s Toolkit*. This toolkit was developed in conjunction with the MoWA following research into the needs of young people in connection to gender-based violence issues in 2008. It provides a way of encouraging responsible, peace-promoting relationships among teenagers and youth.

And, as a final example, an official in the Curriculum Development Department explained that one forthcoming change in the curriculum related to teaching English language will be as follows: “English language we are going to start teaching in Grade 4. Before we did not have teachers, curriculum, or policy to cover English language instruction. So now we cooperate with VSO, Peace Corps, and the British Council to make a curriculum.”

**Library time**

The Sala Phum librarian reported that each class is supposed to use the library for one hour every two weeks. In actual practice, children were not this regular in visiting or using the library. At many break times researchers did observe 1-3 students in the library looking at books or reading. The librarian kept no longitudinal records of visits or visitors to the library; she gave semester reports to the Cluster/DoE and did not keep copies for herself so was unable to comment on trends in library use. The library is intended to be available for community use;
however, no information was available from the librarian regarding the number of community member visits to the library in the previous six months and no village respondents reported having visited the library in the previous six months.

**How “local” is the curriculum?**

Analysis done as part of this doctoral research reveals that illustrations in the Grade 4-5-6 textbooks have been rendered by Cambodian artists, and are easily recognisable as “Cambodia/n” (children / adults, landscape, clothing, architecture, geography). While most are outdated, the photographs used are also clearly of sites and people in Cambodia. Primary school textbooks contain some interesting anomalies in their illustrations. For example, the Grade 4 Khmer text shows an underage child working for wages in a restaurant (presumably included because this is common behaviour) though “child labour” is officially against the law in Cambodia. This same textbook has a lesson called “Smoking is bad” (p. 51) which contains blurry photographs of tobacco plants; however, the benign illustrations do not overtly support the lesson’s key health-related message.

Most of the textbook content regardless of subject is local in orientation. Elements of the syllabus that relate specifically and uniquely to Cambodia (and almost exclusively to the majority Khmer ethnic group) are traditional dances, holidays, elements of a traditional wedding, traditional musical instruments, folk tales, animal stories, historical events, games, art-work, Khmer greeting, geography, natural environment, agriculture and weather, government and legal systems, and Buddhist ceremonies and practices. Exceptions to local content are few. The Grade 5 Khmer text has three stories referenced as being taken from texts of other nations – two from the Philippines, and one from the United States. The Grade 6
Khmer studies book contains one story attributed to a Philippines textbook (a Japanese tale about a grandfather who saves his village from disaster).

In Grade 6, students are introduced to the concept of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations which is comprised of 10 nations). Seven members each have a chapter devoted to describing them (Thailand, Vietnam, Lao, Burma, Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia) while Brunei and Singapore are covered together in a single short lesson. However, other influential regional neighbours, such as China, are not mentioned at all in the Grade 4-6 textbooks, though the United Nations gets one complete chapter. The orientation of materials not specifically “Cambodian” is somewhat biased toward Western nations, and France particularly.

Non-Cambodian subjects are increasingly featured in textbooks beginning with Grade 5. The Grade 5 Social Studies text has several lessons about people and places beyond Cambodia, as shown in Table 27 below.

**Table 27: Example of references to "foreign" content**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Things foreign” – content in Grade 5 Social Studies text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p. 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 22</td>
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<tr>
<td>p. 23-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 45</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In summary, analysis shows clearly that textbooks consistently portray Khmer culture as normative and as being essentially “Cambodian.” In this regard, school content could be
considered “local” when compared to the “global”. But, it could perhaps be characterised as “too local” and insufficiently inclusive of diversity, whether domestic (non-Khmer) or foreign. Valorisation of a particular rendering of tradition and culture is not necessarily positive as it portrays a static society almost exclusively distinguishable by material culture, a reality that is very much at odds with current Cambodia. There is only tokenistic attention paid to indigenous ethnic minorities and to their unique environmental, social, and cultural realities. This research concludes that the textbooks do not truly promote inclusiveness and appreciation for diversity therefore in the Cambodian context cannot be considered truly “local.”

How “Child Friendly” is the curriculum?

In order to assess textbooks to determine their extent of “child friendliness,” researchers analysed text and illustrations against a simple framework of principles and key concepts derived from the 6-dimension CFS framework. These included inclusiveness, child rights, health and safety, and gender. Specific findings are described below. In addition, given that MoEYS’s vision is to develop a knowledge-based society in Cambodia, and that it “has the mission of leading, managing, and developing the education, youth, and sport sector in Cambodia in responding to the socio-economic and cultural needs of its people and the reality of regionalisation and globalisation” (MoEYS, 2010, p. 1-2), textbooks were scrutinised for content related to things beyond Cambodia.

Inclusiveness. Some effort is made in more recently produced textbooks (beginning in 2008) to be “inclusive” in illustrations, so illustrations feature some “minority people” usually symbolised by hill tribes, though Cham people also figure very occasionally. The hill tribes are easily recognisable by their very traditional garb including woven baskets carried on the back. In the Grade 4 Khmer language text in a lesson about “Good Friends,” an indigenous
ethnic minority boy is shown being bandaged and cared for by Khmer children after falling off his bicycle and injuring his knee. The injured boy is a caricature, as he is wearing a necklace, a band around his bicep, no shoes, and a loin-cloth. All the other children are in school uniforms. The Grade 5 Khmer text includes a poem (p. 141) about village occupations which says some villagers work in rice fields while some do weaving; the Chinese do business while the indigenous Kui people takes vines to weave baskets for generating cash.

There is also increasing, but still very minor, inclusion of people who have a physical disability both in illustrations and text. Pictorially this primarily takes the form of a person (usually male) in a crowd, and the handicap featured is typically a missing leg (as in Grade 6 Khmer, p. 1) – perhaps an oblique reference to the on-going legacy of landmines in Cambodia. The Grade 5 Khmer textbook extols the value of honest work and says that each person needs to choose an occupation based on what they like to do and where they live. This is illustrated with four small pictures, one of which is an adolescent male sitting in a wheelchair selling hammocks (p. 138). The Grade 4 Social Studies text includes a picture of a girl in a wheelchair.

The Grade 5 Khmer studies book contains two lessons specifically about disabled children who courageously overcome their physical difficulties. One lesson is about a blind boy named Louis who travels to France and there learns Braille which he then promotes around the world. This story is cited as being “translated from a story called ‘Saving Blind People’ in a Philippines textbook.” The other is about a girl with hearing impairment who receives care in a hospital and is given a hearing aid. The device is a large instrument that hangs around her neck and appears to be a depiction of very old technology. This story is cited as coming from “an American textbook.” The Grade 6 Khmer textbook has one lesson called, “A person that I
like and admire” (p. 51) which features an adult Khmer male with crippled legs who, nevertheless, is a role model in his industriousness, prosperity, good communication, and admirable family.

Inclusiveness in the educational context is a broad concept that is intended to encapsulate “difference” – not only racial, linguistic, and physical differences, but also intangibles such as different political or religious perspectives. Primary school textbooks are limited in portrayal of different religious perspectives, confining it to a single lesson in all 12 textbooks reviewed. The Grade 5 Khmer text (p. 92) contains a lesson about different religions and depicts a Buddhist wat, Buddha sitting beneath a tree, a Christian church, a Muslim mosque, and a neak ta in a spirit house (used to portray animism). In general, Buddhism is strongly portrayed as synonymous with being truly Cambodian. This is perhaps not surprising given that the national motto is “Nation, Religion, King” and that a picture of the Buddha usually flanks the mandatory picture of the King and the Cambodian flag at the front of every classroom.

One other type of (potentially) marginalised people featured in the textbooks under review, is orphans(kompriya). There are three different lessons which feature orphans. One, in the Grade 5 Social Studies book (p. 70), is a lesson called “Shining Sun,” a traditional song about orphans who stay with another family and which describes orphans as being “like chicks without a mother hen.” The song concludes that even if the surrogate family is good to the orphaned children, the orphan will always remain different from the other (birth) children and will be treated differently and worse, e.g., be given less food. The other two instances of content related to orphans are in the Grade 6 Khmer text. One story is about a boy who was sent by his aunt to live in an orphanage when his parents died; he was too depressed to study
well so he scored last in his class. One classmate took pity on him and encouraged him to study. In the end, he succeeds and becomes a good student. The second lesson (p. 134-135) tells the story of three orphans who live with their ailing grandmother. Other villagers have pity on them and give them some food. After she dies, local authorities admit the children to an orphanage. The message of the story is apparently that the orphanage was the only option and was a good option, for the orphaned children, a conclusion that contradicts the RGC’s strong public stance against institutionalisation.

**Child rights lessons.** The Grade 4 Social Studies textbook includes an entire unit dedicated to “Child Rights (four lessons, pages 24-29 in that textbook). In the first lesson (p. 24) the rights actually listed are: right to plant trees with friends, right to say hello to elders, right to play, right to go to school at age six. Lesson two (p. 25), called “Who are children?” differentiates between adults and children by listing characteristics rather than a legal definition. For instance, the lesson says that children are not patient, children like to do what they want rather than what they should, children like to be comforted by adults, children like to play. Lesson three (“Needs and rights of children”) states the basic needs of children and asserts that children have the right to study, to good health, to play, to encouragement from teachers and parents and friends, and to freedom from domestic violence. The fourth and final lesson explains the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Grade 5 Khmer textbook includes one poem about child rights and responsibilities, spelled out as: right to education regardless of race, right to live regardless of how poor or wealthy they are, and the right to be loved. Children have a duty/responsibility to study well and to have a good attitude that will make their parents happy (p. 51). In the Grade 6 Khmer textbook, there is one lesson devoted to “child rights”, called “Children and their lives” (p. 52).
The main message is that children of all nationalities and ethnicities have equal rights and duty to develop their country.

The “rights” and “needs” of children as explained in the textbook tend to be selective (rather than comprehensive) and to deviate (technically) from the actual rights of a child as outlined in the CRC. That is, portrayal is sometimes technically correct, but conceptually misleading, as in the instance where planting a tree is stated as an example of a child’s right.

**Health and safety.** Issues of health and safety are included both in Social Studies texts and Khmer language textbooks. The Grade 4 Social Studies text includes an entire unit on “Personal Safety”. This is comprised of two lessons. In the first, children are instructed about how to decline invitations to “bad behaviour” from “bad friends.” The second is about riding a bicycle and obeying official road traffic signs and rules.

HIV/AIDS is another popular “health and safety” topic. It is introduced first into textbooks in Grade 5 (Social Studies, p. 15), with a single lesson providing a clinical definition of HIV/AIDS and a list of modes of transmission. The Grade 5 Social Studies classes at Sala Phum also periodically used a special book produced through the Interdepartmental Committee for HIV/AIDS (ICHA) which included additional information about HIV/AIDS and addressed the H1N1 virus. The next time HIV/AIDS appears in a textbook is in a single lesson in Grade 6 Social Studies (p. 7-8) called “Preventing HIV.” This reviews modes of transmission and informs students “To prevent yourself from AIDS you need to have only one love partner (daikhu snyha), get a blood test before getting married, and do not use needles.”

**Gender representation.** Obvious effort has been made to have gender balanced illustrations; in virtually every picture where there is more than one person, there are precisely
equal numbers of males and females. This is not the same with photographs which are often used to help explain Cambodia’s political system and which feature males almost exclusively. Further, in any given picture, and overall, males are more often than females depicted in physically active roles (e.g., playing soccer, working in a field), in professional capacities (e.g., as scientists), and in positions of authority (e.g., school teacher, government official, judge). In all textbooks reviewed, a significant proportion of people pictured as wearing traditional clothing are female.

The narrative treatment of gender is also more favourable of males than females. For example, in the Grade 5 Khmer textbook there is a series of lessons about the importance of people (“geniuses”) leaving to posterity their “valuable work” (e.g., sculpture, dance, songs, movies, music). All three artists featured are male. Taken individually, it may seem benign to feature these particular artists and their work, but taken as a whole, the message strongly suggests male superiority.

The Chbap Srey (“Women’s Law”) is not explicitly mentioned in any of the textbooks for grades 4-6. However, the Chbap Pro (Men’s Law”) is cited in the Grade 4 Khmer text (unit 3, page 41) as a “Poem about Men’s Law”. The verses which are included are addressed to “people” in general, not to males or to females specifically. People are instructed to be polite in speaking. Children are reminded that if they do not behave well this will reflect badly on their parents and then their parents should be blamed for not disciplining their children properly. The Chbap Pro is featured again in the grade 6 Khmer textbook (p. 43). Again it is called “The Poem of the Chbap Pro”, advises both men and women to be polite and not to boast, and specifically states that this advice is applicable to both males and females.
In all but one history lesson, women are mentioned as wives or daughters and described primarily in terms of their physical attributes. The exceptional story is about a male hero, Neak Ta Kleng Meang who attempts to kill himself in order to make his soul stronger. It is illustrated with a line drawing of a dozen army personnel clustered around a deep pit. The Research Assistant recognised that this depicts a story which includes an historical female military leader (called Yei Mou, or Grandmother Mou) who volunteers her life to save the others in her platoon. In all other history lessons, women are mentioned as wives or daughters and described primarily in terms of their physical attributes.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of Child Friendly Schools, its philosophical basis, as well as its historic origins and introduction by the UN to Southeast Asia and to Cambodia. On several points, CFS is shown to be at odds with fundamental Cambodian values. Points of contention include the rights and roles of children; constructivist view of education and knowledge; individual agency; democratic engagement; gender norms; inquiry-based learning; and student-centred pedagogy. Furthermore, the national-level context is one in which education is regarded primarily as the “means” to the vaunted “end” of enhanced social capital for economic growth and global competitiveness. This stands in some contrast to the human rights discourse in which CFS is based.

This chapter described the school setting where this research occurred, and profiled the Sala Phum administrators and teachers to highlight their firsthand exposure to historical events that directly impact their capacity to work and their (deficient) equipping by the MoEYS. The chapter provided an overview of teacher attitudes about their working environment and their own perception of the social and environmental variables that affect their classroom behaviour.
The majority of teachers expressed consternation about what they regard as a generally moral demise which, combined with a child rights agenda and other disempowering elements of CFS, negatively affects student attitudes and behaviour and teacher capacity for managing classrooms. Community engagement with education to the extent envisioned in the CFS policy and guidebooks, and child/student participation in any school-related activities other than classroom learning, are simply either not occurring or occur in very limited manner.

The administrative environment was shown to be highly centralised, strictly regulatory, and insufficiently supportive of teachers. The primary school curriculum was shown to be almost too local, and to carry rather mixed messages, some technically incorrect and others simply limited about CFS fundamentals such as inclusiveness, child rights, gender equality, health and safety.
CHAPTER SEVEN: LOCAL PRACTICES OF CFS

Current practice of formal basic education in Cambodia could be summarised by noting a system-wide preoccupation with “form” (image) rather than “function” (implementation). This is very evident in the implementation of the Child Friendly School policy. In fact, there are many ways in which the enactment of CFS in Cambodia differs significantly from both the actual policy and practice guidelines, as well as from CFS as it occurs in other countries.

This chapter is comprised of two major sections. The first section provides a detailed overview of how Child Friendly Schools are understood by practitioners, and how this understanding is transmitted to daily implementation of classroom practice, student assessment, discipline, and parental involvement. The second section first points out that the locus of “local” can and does occur at different levels of the education system, depending on what the external reference point is (“local” compared to what?). Then it moves to provide a 9-point analytical framework for understanding local negotiation of the Child Friendly Schools concept.

Observing Local Implementation of CFS

While MoEYS officials and school level staff all were familiar (to varying extents) with the term “CFS” and with related concepts, that was not the case for students. Even so, there are particular elements of CFS which children expressed appreciation for and enjoyment with. Three of the most commonly cited events were that students generally preferred to work in groups rather than individually; they liked being able to work on the blackboard rather than being confined to work at their desks; and they appreciated the “beautiful” classroom environment (pictures on the walls). As with students, very few participants in
parent/caregiver interviews and focus group discussions had heard of the term “Child Friendly School” or any related terms. Parents did not know that Sala Phum is considered a Child Friendly School. Teachers indicated that they had not shared with parents about CFS because “they had not been instructed by the MoEYS to tell them about it” (G-P11, FGD event). This omission could be explained several ways. It is possible that the teachers did not think it relevant or necessary information for parents to have, or that teachers did not want to be held accountable for implementing CFS. It could also be that teachers refrained from communicating this fact because of the common perception that knowledge is power.

This section provides details about MoEYS central, and classroom level, perceptions and (theoretical) understandings of Child Friendly Schools. Then it moves to look at actual teacher activity in the classroom; overall, evidence suggests that general theoretical knowledge is greater than teacher capacity. It may be that the limited form and extent of knowledge is what constrains teacher practice; it could also be attributed to an implicit values-conflict that a teacher may not even be aware of as something other than a general discomfort.

**Perceptions and understandings**

This section describes how MoEYS staff at the central level, as well as at village level, understands “CFS” generally. And specifically, it provides some detail on how some of the commonly cited elements of the policy, such as group work and slow learners, are defined and understood by education practitioners.

**Done deal.** Invariably from MoEYS staff, there was also, a sense in which they described CFS as already accomplished; that is, existence of a policy document and activity surrounding it was interpreted as actual implementation of the policy aims (Bernard, 2008; Pearson, 2011). Indeed, almost immediately after the CFS policy was announced, roughly 70
percent of schools across the country were designated as having “Child Friendly” status (Bernard, 2008). This apparent dis-connect between policy and reality could be explained in terms of Khmer culture, as in Howes & Ford’s (2011) analysis of negotiation of globalisation at the higher education level:

[In Cambodia] the role of leaders is to provide moral direction and state what ‘should be correct’, but without any expectation that the direction will necessarily be followed. Examples abound of new laws and rules that have been announced publicly which have then been almost completely ignored. This can explain why Cambodian leaders often do not feel the need to consult with those who might be responsible for implementation of goals which is different to rule-based management in which consultation is a prerequisite and management usually accept responsibility for implementing goals and enforcing rules. The result is that Cambodian leadership is freed from the practicalities of implementation and so can easily create very moral, politically correct, idealistic goals which may not necessarily be achievable. (Howes & Ford, 2011, p. 170)

Happy students. Personnel in various central departments of MoEYS (including departments of Curriculum, Teacher Training, Primary School, and the Gender Working Group) described and explained Child Friendly Schools in different ways, but a common theme in their definitions related to attitudes (“making children happy”), activities, and appearance (keeping school grounds tidy) as demonstrated by the following indicative statements.

- “CFS means that child is friendly with school and school is friendly with the child.” (I-A7)
- “CFS means Child Friendly. And friendly means happy, so we want children to be happy in their studying and to like to come to study.” (I-P64)
- “…after we stick up pictures and posters, the children seem happy. When they see the teachers’ work like that it encourages them to be happy and to want to study.” (I-P58)
- “It is important to attract children.” (I-P41)
- “Most important point is school environment. Effective teaching and learning is also important.” (I-P40)

Teachers and administrators at Sala Phum Primary, and in the cluster schools visited during research, are generally aware of the terms “Child Friendly School” and “Student
Centred Learning.” However, while many can notionally cite at least a few of the six dimensions, many also say they “know some but not all” or that “I have forgotten more information than I still retain” about CFS. Many teachers throughout the Seksa Cluster explained CFS in relational terms. For example:

- “The Child Friendly way requires teachers and students to be like friends.” (I-P67)
- “Child Friendly Schools is student cooperation.” (I-P82, School 2, class 6)
- “[CFS means] don’t make children afraid of school, foster them to love school, encourage them to love each other and no fighting.” (I-P67).
- “[In CFS] students dare to ask the teacher [because they are not afraid].” (I-P82, School 3, class 1)
- “Samaki [unity or harmony]! It means working together.” (I-P82, School 5, class 3)
- “A school full of affection between teachers and students; students give love to each other. But, too much love means students become unruly.” (I-P71)
- “Before, only teachers responsible for education; now community, family, students are responsible!” (I-A7)

As with officials at the central MoEYS level, another common related theme amongst teachers was an understanding of CFS as giving a good feeling or happiness to students:

- “[CFS is] giving pleasure and enjoyment to children.” (I-P52)
- “Child Friend is that we want to attract children to feel happy with their study when they get in the school.” (I-P57)
- “[CFS is] making the children happy and want to come to school.” (I-P33)

**CFS as activity rather than approach.** CFS is understood by teacher and administrators to be an activity or a particular technique, rather than an overall philosophy or approach to the teaching and learning enterprise; and viewed as a requirement from higher authorities rather than regarded as something inherently valuable. Witness the apology of a teacher at one of the satellite schools in Seksa cluster, to the research team after they’d observed her class: “If I had known you were coming to observe then I would have made this a child-friendly class! But I didn’t know you were coming, so I teach as normal” (I-P83). This sentiment was also expressed by teachers at Sala Phum, as they too contrasted “normal
teaching” with “Child Friendly teaching” in terms of teaching style, teaching materials, and physical appearance of the classroom. One teacher explained his reluctance to teach CFS like this: “If I [teach like that], then I need to rearrange the table since we need to work in groups. It can’t be done in a row table like this.” (I-P69)

Another common response was: “If someone comes to watch or visit, then I will spend time to prepare lessons.” Based on the fact that they made such a distinction (between doing CFS and teaching as normal), Sala Phum teachers of grades 4-6 were requested to prepare and demonstrate a CFS class. One SPPS teacher prefaced her demonstration CFS class with “This will be a more beautiful (sa’at) class than usual” (I-B3). “Doing CFS” is often equated with specific activities. As one teacher explained it: “I should have drawn a picture on the board for the students because that is CFS. But I am not a good drawer. And I have a picture in the book that I can just point to, so no need to draw it for them!” (I-B2)

Several teachers stated that they thought CFS is easier to do for younger children because “They like to play games more than the older ones”. One teacher explained: “It is easier to teach in CFS way to lower levels, like there are pictures to show them for spelling. But for higher levels, we don’t use pictures” (I-P60). KAPE evaluators (2007a) had a similar finding. They note that while teachers accepted the need to increase the numbers and kinds of activities that children did in class, still:

…they had not fully internalised why this was necessary other than the fact that doing so kept children engaged in the lesson. That is, they had not fully realised that learning is already implicit in such activities and that their purpose is not simply to keep children happy until they can get through the ‘real’ learning task. This often affected their ability to make tasks considered to be real learning tasks stimulating and contextually meaningful… (2007, p. 26)

On the actual CFS demonstration day, students in all classes indicated that they had been informed by their teacher that the designated class was “special”, though they said they
had not been instructed to behave in any particular way. In several classes, the students reported that the lesson was not new to them, rather one they’d done previously. It is possible that teachers (re)taught because they regard students’ ability to respond or read well as an indicator of their good teaching and if teaching a new lesson, teachers risk having students who don’t know the answer, who stumble through the reading, or who cannot respond.

Conflating CFS with Student Centred Learning. Teachers frequently conflate CFS and student-centred learning as exemplified by one Grade 4 teacher (I-P62): “Yes, student centred learning it is CFS.” And as a Grade 6 teacher explained: “First KAPE called it student-centred learning; now they call it Child Friendly School” (I-P72). When asked to define or describe SCL, the response is often a slight variation on: “The student centred learning is suh mien sakhamaphiep charan chieng kru [lit. the students have more activities than teacher]” (I-P59). Another variant is: “Teacher only gives the students problems and then lets the students solve the problem. And [teacher] facilitates [samrap samrulel]” (I-P65). In fact, all teachers indicated that they feel SCL to be less tiring and less demanding for them in the classroom than the more traditional “teacher centred learning.” A typical explanation is: “before, the teacher talks a lot; now the students work a lot!”

Active students. As suggested in the section immediately preceding, both SCL and being Child Friendly were frequently described in terms of “active students.” Activity was described in general terms of participation, practice, and asking questions. For example:

- “Students have more activities and practice more [with CFS].” (I-P58)
- “For the Child Friendly way, they let children to have more practice and participation [than in the previous era]. [The only thing that has changed is that] the concept of Child Friendly is giving more practice to students.” (I-P61)
Conflating CFS with materials. Lack of materials (somphireak) and lack of time for preparation (viewed primarily as writing out a lesson plan) were the two reasons most commonly cited for inability to “do CFS”. One teacher explained: “If I could, I would make lesson plans, word cards, and pictures and these things would make my work more CFS. But, I cannot; because we don’t get enough salary I must do this and that to earn more. And I am also busy at home” (O-C10, Grade 4 teacher). Another common sentiment was that CFS is possible in other countries where they have money and access to materials, but not possible in Cambodia because teachers don’t have sufficient materials.

- “For other country [like Australia] ok; but for Cambodia, CFS is difficult because the teacher needs enough material to use.” (I-P67)
- “If we had a vast variety of materials like in other countries, then it will work well here too.” (I-P57)

CFS is also frequently described as teaching that uses “materials”. When asked to prepare “the very best, most child friendly class you can”, Grade 4-6 teachers at Sala Phum all requested to demonstrate a math class “because it’s easy to use sticks and stones,” saying that other subjects were too difficult. They indicated that they struggle to find materials that can be used for teaching Khmer Language and said it was nearly impossible to teach Social Studies in a child friendly way because they “did not have traditional instruments or things like that.”

Slow learners. Another other frequently mentioned element of CFS was “slow learners” (rien yeut commonly defined as: “students who learn slowly;” the other term popularly used to refer to “slow learners” was suh kasowee, or “weak students”). Most teachers indicated that about half of their students fall into the “slow learner” category, and all teacher asked said that more boys than girls were included in this category. Although they obviously recognise that some students do not comprehend lessons as quickly as others, teachers did not demonstrate a nuanced understanding of differences in challenges to learning,
nor did any employ strategies to individualise lesson plans or work one-on-one with the students requiring more assistance.

Previously, and for a short period, with NGO funding, teachers were given a stipend to tutor “slow learners” in students’ homes. This form of extra tutorial assistance ceased when the NGO stopped providing funds for it. Currently some primary schools in the Seksa Cluster addressed “slow learners” by using Thursdays as a “review day” – students were divided into two groups (weak and not weak): teachers focused on the group of weak students in reviewing the week’s lessons or even just basic alphabet recognition and reading skills, while the other students were told to quietly read their textbooks and were otherwise largely ignored. In summary then, the way that Cambodian teachers work with slow learners is simply to continue repeating what they have already taught, but not modifying their pedagogy. Still, despite the rather broad and rough categorisation of learners into two groups, this distinction does indicate teacher recognition that students learn at different paces, a change from the past when teachers paid no attention to addressing differences in learners. Thus, potential exists to capitalise on this.

**Group work.** A fifth frequently cited aspect of CFS was “group work” (*tve-ka chiya krome*). “CFS teaches students in groups; not only individuals but in groups. Shows them pictures and they discuss with each other. That is CFS when they join together.” (I-P54)

Another teacher explained: “Before, we taught in one large group. Teachers asked students individually. But from the year 2000, we started with Child Friendly – we arranged the children into groups. That is the only different point.” (I-P58)

Sometimes group work was also conflated with student-centred learning, as exemplified by one Sala Phum teacher who explained: “[At that time] KAPE wants to have
student centred study, so we form students to work as a group and pose the matter/problem for
student to work on…” (I-P64) Another teacher said: “Now I [explain] the SCL – the students
work in groups. The most effective [way of teaching] is the work in groups” (I-P68). This
same teacher noted: “If not [in groups] then it is not the student centred learning. But the
groups can be big or small.” Almost all teachers were quite supportive of group work because
“strong can help weak.” This support was described by one teacher (I-P57) this way: “When
the teacher asks them to work in group then they can discuss/talk to each other so they can
know, remember. They can improve by this way – the one who knows better [neak dial che
chieng kay = lit. the one who knows the most] in the group can explain to the one who does not
know so much [neak men suv che].”

Group work was also regarded appreciatively by teachers as a way to relieve their
workload because using groups meant that they spent less time talking at the front of the
classroom. Some teachers, though supportive of the concept and active in using it, were also a
bit apprehensive about this method as they noted the propensity for group work to slide into
chaos and be more difficult to control.

Questions/inquiry. The youngest teacher (the one who most recently completed
studies at the provincial Teacher Training College) at Sala Phum, responsible for one of the
grade 6 classes, was most adept at remembering some of the tools/lists/protocols that are
included in the CFS Guidebooks (I-P72). However, in attempting to describe some, she
confused three distinct schematics (lesson planning, steps for running a class, types of
questions). This last point about “questions for students” was one of noticeably few references
to different levels of thinking skills expressed during the entire 5-month observation period.
Another was an appeal to the MoEYS’s modified question-taxonomy made by a Vice Director
from the Core School (Seksa School) during a Thursday monthly training meeting for teachers, as he critiqued a teacher’s attempt at modeling an SCL class. During a focus group discussion, Sala Phum teachers identified “critical thinking” as an objective for their students; some teachers also expressed the fact that they were aware there are “different types of questions,” understood by the researcher as an oblique reference to Bloom’s taxonomy.

**Advantages/disadvantages.** Teachers identified four main advantages of CFS compared to previous ways of teaching. First, students have so much work to do in the class that they cannot get distracted. Secondly, students learn more quickly with materials. Third, in groups students can share ideas, speak out, not afraid. And fourth, teachers perceive that students enjoy coming to school more, and are more interested in school than under previous teaching methods.

The list of disadvantages cited by teachers was much longer than perceived benefits. At the top of that list is the fact that CFS requires more time/effort by teacher than previous methods and it is difficult to produce materials because schools and teachers do not have enough money or time. Several indicated that their knowledge about CFS is limited so it is more difficult to produce materials different from what they had already been taught to make by KAPE. More than one teacher complained about not personally owning, and not being able to make, traditional musical instruments to show students. In many rural villages there are likely to be at least a few residents with traditional instruments, it is common for roving traditional musical troupes to visit villages and play for weddings and funerals, and shops in many larger towns sell souvenir-style traditional instruments. Thus, these complaints would seem to be another instance of the difficulty teachers have with adapting information from one
context to another, or thinking creatively more than a genuine dearth of opportunities to access instruments.

Logistical issues are also regarded as an impediment to implementing CFS. For example: “in countries with smaller desks it is easier to cluster them; in Cambodia with big desks it is hard to move them” (I-P68). And, the central CFS principle of inclusiveness, expressed most overtly in the aim of universal access (‘collect all’) is not regarded by all teachers as necessarily positive because everyone can come to school (“even students who are not serious”) and therefore many students will perform poorly.

**Actual classroom practice**

“Classroom interaction” is actually a whole independent area of study within education studies, replete with its own set of theories, jargon, conventional wisdom, and theoretical constructs. Flander’s Interaction Analysis Categories System (FIACS) is perhaps the most well-known analytical device in this sector and has been used extensively in low, middle- and high-income countries, whether in pure or modified form (Pontefract & Hardman, 2005). Classroom verbal interaction analysis focuses on the nature, quality, and relative proportion of teacher talk (noted as either direct or indirect), pupil/student talk, and silence or confusion. It is not so concerned with the nature of other activities in a classroom during a class period.

This research did not aspire to be a full-fledged “classroom interaction analysis,” rather it aimed to paint a larger canvas picture of education as it occurs in a particular context. To achieve this, classroom interaction and teacher/student speech patterns were observed and analysed, of course, but in a less regimented way than advocated by FIACS. Additionally, attention was given to the environment or context in which classroom interaction occurred, and to all activities which occurred at school during a (typical) school day.
Learning environment: school-yard and classroom. Seen from the outside, school blocks in Cambodia look virtually the same regardless of location, external support sources, and classroom instruction. Classroom blocks are of uniform architecture and colour; there are usually trees in the schoolyard; a small garden; play equipment in varying degrees of repair; and statue/s of Buddha. Likewise, the most obvious indicators of Child Friendly schools are visual and it is not easy to know about the quality of CFS implementation simply from appearance. CFS schools tend to exhibit tidy school yards and toilet blocks; brightly painted playground equipment; administration offices plastered with statistics; and, inside classrooms, heavily decorated walls. In keeping with the socio-cultural focus on appearance, the dominant theme of the Sala Phum Director’s daily exhortation to students, delivered immediately after the national anthem was sung, was “neatness” (appearance). He admonished students to: “clean the school yard,” “stack your bicycles carefully not messily,” and “do not litter your papers in our yard.” For the first few minutes of an average school day, immediately following the flag-raising ceremony, students from every class set to sweeping and cleaning the central school yard, watering plants, filling water cisterns in the toilet. Given the emphasis on appearance, a curiously consistent phenomenon is that central school yards are barren of garbage, but at the back of classrooms there are piles of plastic wrappers and litter.

Classroom walls are heavily laden with posters and pictures. In many cases, words or letters or pictures attached to string are draped diagonally across the room. There is some similarity in layout, regardless of grade level – for instance, student work is displayed on the back wall (most often work from art class); posters illustrating five forms of traditional greeting and colour-designated days of the week (the purpose of these was consistently described as “preserving culture”), plus classroom/school policies are displayed on the wall.
behind the teacher’s desk. In several instances, teachers said they had followed instructions from a TTC training and designated four corners of the classroom for different subjects (“math”, “reading”, “social science”, “Khmer”) by posting small signs; they also said they had done little else to reflect the corner’s designation.

Common pictures—some printed, some hand-drawn—are the Angkor Wat temple, hand-drawn maps of Cambodia, posters exhibiting basic geometric shapes, traffic signals, child safety posters, math equations, alphabet charts, and 3-D paper flowers. In many classrooms, there are posted four silhouette heads of famous people – three males and one female. These are two singers famous during Sihanouk and Lon Nol eras who were killed during the Pol Pot era; Mr. Chuan Nat (the monk who wrote the first Khmer-Khmer language dictionary which subsequently became the national reference dictionary); and Mr. Krom Noy (the man who rendered into writing the oral moral code Chbap Srey).

In most classrooms there is at least one, and often multiple, Ministry of Health posters—for example, to promote vaccinations, hand-washing, or to inform about Avian influenza. A poster featuring photographs and explanation of illegal drugs was common; as were Helen Keller International (HKI) posters about food groups and CMAC (Cambodia Mine Action Centre) posters illustrating different types of landmines. One Sala Phum classroom had a colourful ginseng advertisement posted on the wall behind the teacher’s desk. In several Sala Phum classrooms, completed pages of random objects from Western colouring books (including winter snow scenes) had been torn out and posted on the walls. The colouring books were reportedly a gift to the school from a local Christian orphanage.
Two more posters on the walls of virtually all classrooms observed were one showing the colours which Khmer associate with the seven days of the week\textsuperscript{39} and one demonstrating the Khmer traditional respectful greeting, five postures for the \textit{somphiek}. On both posters, the figures are obviously female adults and are clothed in traditional garments. The five forms of greeting designate respect for the person being greeted – hands held at chest level is used with people equal or below in social status/age; mouth level is used with people of slightly higher social status and/or age (such as older siblings, employer, and for married women – the husband is to be greeted this way); hands held at nose level is to greet parents, teachers, and grandparents; eyebrow level is reserved for royal persons, Buddhist monks, Buddha images and other sacred objects; and finally, hands held at the forehead is used to address divinity – the gods Brahma and Indra, as well as supplicating for something.

A final note about the pictures on classroom walls is that the research team noted that the student (art) work displayed on walls was startlingly uniform. For example, in one Grade 1 classroom at Sala Phum, all students had completed the same picture, with the same colours, all had contained colour within the lines, and colouring had been done very lightly.

The three most common explanations from teachers about the purpose of having pictures on the wall were: the colours attract children to come and study; second, pictures “help students remember;” and third, the pictures provide a resource for students “when they do not know the answers.” The majority of teachers indicated that they change the pictures less than

\textsuperscript{39} Sunday = red, Monday = orange (like a monk’s tunic), Tuesday = purple, Wednesday = green, Thursday = colour of the sky (sky blue, light green, or grey are English renderings of this Khmer colour), Friday = blue, and Saturday = black. Traditionally, particularly women wore dresses according to this colour scheme, and especially for formal ceremonies. The days’ colours are also representative of personal fortune. For example, it is considered bad luck to sell goods or lend money on a Monday. These connections are obscure to Westerners, but well understood by Khmer.
once per year, citing lack of supplies as the reason for infrequently altering what is displayed. Several said they replace pictures when the current pictures fall down.

Students indicated that they enjoy the colourful decorations, and many students had a favourite picture. The most common reason given by students for the displays was that it makes them feel good: “It makes us happy; we see the pictures and we want to come to school.” Several students reported that they sometimes used the information on the walls to help them during tests, or when they cannot remember the answer to a teacher’s question.

Many Grade 4 and Grade 5 classrooms had boxes of “materials” on unused desks lining the classroom walls: clay figurines made by students, sticks, shells, rocks standing in plastic water bottles that had been cut to serve as containers. Several classrooms in the cluster schools had piles of broken wooden desks and blackboards in a back corner, ostensibly awaiting repair.

Another ubiquitous feature on classroom walls, as well as posted on trees or signs in school compounds throughout the Cluster Schools, is education-related adages. Some were extracts from traditional poems, traditional sayings; many were contemporary. A few examples are included in Table 28. Appeal to these adages could be interpreted as an example of oral forms of transmission of behavioural and moral norms, highlighting in textual form the as-yet fundamentally oral nature of society.

**Student attendance and absenteeism.** An average of five students were absent from each class observed during this research period. This rough average was arrived at by simply calculating the number of students absent in 22 of the observed class periods (from February through July). In these 22 classes, only two had full attendance; the largest number absent from a single class was more than half (13/24). One Grade 5 teacher noted that there is more student absenteeism now than there was when he was a student (I-65). He explained that
in the past, the teacher would be strict and hit students, therefore students did not come to class late nor did they miss class without a very good reason. The current situation has been increasing year-by-year with more absenteeism each year, according to this teacher. Sometimes the students ask for permission ahead of time, sometimes not; sometimes they give a reason, other times they do not. Generally, teachers interpreted this inconsistency as disrespectful behaviour, part of the moral demise of contemporary Cambodia.

Table 28: Examples of slogans in classrooms and school yards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adage / saying</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional adages</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nev pteah medaye ti-tye; ne preye medaye ti-mooey. [At home different/separate mother; outside home [in forest], same mother.]</td>
<td>Help each other outside the home – you are all brothers and sisters out there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mien vicheya ut cha’ria; doik bopha ut kuntia. [Education without good behaviour is like a flower without a good smell.]</td>
<td>Admonition to have good behaviour; having high level of education is not as important as having good behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menew ak vichiya priep doik m’new kwak penake tayeng song khang. [For people who have no knowledge, it’s like both eyes are blind.]</td>
<td>People who don’t get an education / don’t go to school, are unable to think about the future, are just reactive, are naïve. [Most often adults admonish children with this adage.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kru kap yuwa pruah suh la’ah. [Teacher gets honour because of good student.]</td>
<td>The way we know a teacher is effective/good teacher, is because that teacher’s students will be good students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towk eye neung dye, t’lay aye neung moat. [Hand is not cheap; mouth is also not so valuable.]</td>
<td>If you don’t know, ask someone; don’t be afraid to ask advice; it’s ok to help someone who asks you for help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contemporary sayings / slogans</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rien mien buon bype: rien yoke chomnay dung, chumneang, owprume atakcherut, a neung akup-pak-keriya la’ah. [There are 4 types of education: education for knowledge, for skills, for attitude and peaceful living, for good character/behaviour.]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rien apiwhot kluin-eyng, kru sa, neung sangkume chiyet. [Study in order to develop yourself, family, and country/nation.]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadaap baan la’ah, rien baan la’ah (leun). [Listen well and you will learn [know how to do] well/quickly.]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suh l’oah rien pukai. [A good student studies well / cleverly.]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rien ne sala, mien ply p’ka nev sahakum. [Study at school, get results [fruit] at the community.]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Seating arrangements.** The teacher’s desk is always situated at the front of the classroom to one side of the large blackboard that is the room’s primary point of reference. A few teachers had a small wicker shelf near their desk, holding a small number of books and papers. Shared wooden bench-desks (with the backless seat attached to the desktop) remain the norm in rural primary school classrooms. These desks frequently include a small shelf for storing books, materials, and school bags. Most often they are built to accommodate two children; in some schools they are long enough for 3-4 children to sit side-by-side. Desks are invariably placed in rows facing the front of the classroom.

Usually teachers assign seats to students in primary school. And, most often, seating is by sex – boys sit with boys, girls share a desk with other girls. Frequently, rows of boys alternate with rows of girls; teachers report that they intentionally do this so that when they break up into groups, the girls/boys just have to turn and face each other and instantly have a mixed group. Although some teachers did report intentionally placing a male/female pair at each desk as a strategy to keep the boys on-task and stop them from playing, same-sex pairs was the most commonly observed seating arrangement.

**Teaching style.** Whole class, directive, didactic teaching dominates Cambodian classrooms, although group work is conducted for at least part of nearly every class across all subjects. There is little (if any) differentiation for individual student ability. Frequently, for the majority of class time the teacher stands at the front of the classroom facing students; less often, though not uncommonly observed, the teacher walks through the classroom. Class time follows a standard format of three phases: introduction (usually the question: “What did we learn last class?”), main activity (reading in various combinations) including some time for group work, and closing (often this was a homework assignment). In learning tasks across all
subjects, emphasis is on factual, descriptive (propositional) knowledge rather than on personal or procedural knowledge. There is heavy reliance on repetition and reproduction, with a significant amount of class time allocated for shifting information from one location to another, usually without modification. That is, copying from the textbook onto the blackboard, reading out the text, and copying content from the blackboard into notebooks. A lot of class time is simply variation on reading the textbook aloud: the teacher reads from the teacher guidebook, students are called upon to stand and read individually from their textbook, occasionally students are told to remain seated and read the text aloud to themselves.

Ostensibly, rote learning – simplistically defined as memorisation based on repetition – dominates Cambodian classroom practice. However, to describe the typically repetitive classroom practice is not necessarily to denigrate rote learning. First of all, simple repetition is not technically synonymous with rote learning – so what is happening in the Cambodian classroom may not even technically be considered rote learning. And second, extensive research particularly from/about so-called Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC) highlights both the usefulness of memorisation as a step to understanding and the value of the (non-Western) notion that questions should come after knowledge has been gained rather than using questions as a means for acquiring knowledge (P. Tan, 2011; Watkins & Biggs, 1996; Watkins, 2000). Memorisation, rote learning, and repetition are valuable learning methods and especially in combination with other instructional modes.

Research shows that teacher-led recitation which is the norm in low-income countries, in its prototypical form consists of three moves called IRF (initiation in the form of the teacher’s question; response as students’ attempt to answer; and follow-up where the teacher provides some form of feedback). As explained by Pontefract & Hardman (2005):
This three-part exchange...structure...often consists of closed teacher questions, brief pupil answers which teachers do not build upon, superficial praise rather than diagnostic feedback, and an emphasis on recalling information rather than genuine exploration of a topic. Recitation questioning therefore seeks predictable correct answers and only rarely are teachers’ questions used to assist pupils to more complete or elaborated ideas. (Pontefract & Hardman, 2005, p. 88)

In a typical class (excluding math classes) observed during the research period, students stand and individually read aloud a designated portion of the textbook; usually the same passage is read 3-4 times consecutively by different students each time; or the whole class is instructed to read the same text aloud 1-2-3 times in unison. In cases where an individual student has difficulty reading, frequently the teacher (and often other students as well) is quick to interject, then reading ahead so the faltering student continues by simply repeating what she/he hears rather than reading independently. After several times of reading the lesson aloud, teachers copy directly from their textbook the instructions for answering questions onto the blackboard, then write out the actual questions. This information is identical to what is contained in the student textbooks. Students break into groups to copy the answers directly from the textbook onto a paper; one member then walks to the front of the classroom with the paper when the group has completed the assignment. When all groups are finished, their representatives standing at the front of the classroom read out the answers; teachers instruct the student sitting at their desks to copy the answer/s into their notebooks. And then the cycle starts again.

As for general time management, in their classroom practice teachers seldom indicated specific temporal parameters on prescribed activities. For instance, teaches tell students to write out answers to the questions in the textbook and then bring their notebooks to the teacher’s desk when finished. This tends to result in long waiting periods for some students, as the range of ability (and time required to complete the assignment) varies widely in a given
An activity labelled conversation (ka-santeneya) in the textbooks, though more accurately described as “role play,” is sometimes employed. During the period of observation students engaging in this were assigned roles by the teacher, but then read the text from their books rather than attempting to work spontaneously with the assigned characters.

Sometimes teachers do attempt to connect textbook content to village life. This tended to take the form of “have you ever seen xx [e.g. someone with jaundice or someone with AIDS; this kind of tree; a particular ceremony, etc.] in your village?” In responding to the RT’s question about whether or not they conduct field trips with students, or take students outside the classroom to see/learn something, teachers generally expressed awareness that such activities could be helpful as a way to connect textbook information with real life. However, they seldom did this. One teacher explained why: “When I practice CFS, sometimes I take the children outside to look at plants, to study the sun….But when they go outside and come back in they are very unruly so I do not do this much” (O-C22, Gr. 2 teacher) Another gave similar rationale: “I want to use materials, but if we go out to show students something, we will waste the time; it is so disorganised to get them out and back to classroom” (I-P59).

One interesting phenomenon that occurred regularly across all grades, though not frequently in any single class, was a “call and response” between teacher and students – what Pontefract & Hardman (2005) refer to as “cued elicitation” (p. 90), which are often elaborate prompts designed to provide clues to students for how to respond. This antiphonal practice
was always initiated by the teacher through a shifting of tone and cadence, and often consisted of the application of the tag question “baan (agreement/right)/aht (disagreement/wrong)” as the trigger for answering these [rhetorical] questions in loud unison. For example, when teaching math class the teacher might say: “When multiplying fractions you first obtain a common denominator, baan/aught?”

This antiphonal practice is not confined to the baan/aht cue; vocal inflection (placement and rhythm, loud/soft) acts just as effectively. Rather than being an authentic attempt to ascertain student comprehension, these “pseudo-checking” events function as “ritualised participation strategies, designed to keep the pupils involved rather than requiring an answer to a question” (Pontefract & Hardman, 2005, p. 90). The following is an instance of one such exchange occurred in a Cluster School Grade 7 class (O-P82) several times during the class period. In fact, during the 50-minute Social Studies class, the sole thing pupils learned was the name of the (six) countries the Mekong River runs through.

Teacher: “How many countries border the Mekong River?”
Students chorus back: “Six!”
Teacher: “And which countries are those?”
Students shout in unison: “China, Burma, Lao, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam!”

The type of knowledge that predominates in a Cambodian primary school class, as well as the amount of knowledge, is limited. Significant amounts of time are spent doing minimal work – reading the same lesson 4-5 times, for example. By the end of many class periods there have been just 3-4 facts featured, or a half dozen math problems solved using the same procedure. Lessons are completed as per the teacher guidelines (in that the teacher moves from the start to the end of the lesson and following instructions precisely), but there seems to be little content beyond descriptive knowledge, facts, and simple information. A great deal of information is simply shifted from one place to another – from guidebook to board, from board
to notebook. Little is added or taken from it, and there is virtually no synthesis, analysis, or
application to real-life daily situation/s or the national context. Minimal effort is made to relate
the information to the students’ current reality; or to account for that reality (such as
encouraging students to make observations of their immediate environment, to use local place
names as examples, names, and so forth).

**Teacher-student interaction.** Generally, students are respectful to the office of
teacher and other educational authorities. They demonstrate this by standing in rows outside
the class, and then entering the room quietly when instructed by their class monitor, standing to
offer a unison greeting for visitors, and waiting for their teacher to tell them to be seated,
before chorusing group gratitude to the teacher and then sitting down. As another
demonstration of respect in class, students usually stand when called upon to answer a question
(or read aloud).

Generally, students do not appear fearful of teachers – which teachers reported as a
significant change from when they themselves were primary school students. More than one
teacher explained: “When I was a primary school student, if I saw my teacher across the field,
I would begin to shake with fear” (I-P58). And one teacher explained: “Just seeing the
teacher, we were afraid of her!” (I-P61). Teachers attributed the change primarily to the policy
shift which discourages corporal punishment, as well as to their efforts to “act and speak
gently” with students, and to a lesser though not negligible extent, to the general breakdown in
social values. Students often clamour for the teacher’s attention when asked to volunteer to
read a text or answer a question, or to participate in a role play. In one grade 6 cluster school
classroom, a female student walked up, unsolicited, to the teacher to inform him of a spelling
error he’d made on the blackboard, and then corrected it on the board.
Teachers often called on the same 1-2-3 students in each class to answer questions, write on the board, or read out of a text. More often than not, the students called upon were correct and fluent in reading. It was not obvious whether or not this tendency to select the same students was the norm, perhaps the result of teachers wanting to demonstrate their skills by exhibiting successful students to observers – that is, students who can read fluently.

In the classroom setting, teachers strongly emphasise being correct or right – which could be one reason why children are seldom asked for their opinion or ideas, or given opportunity for creative interaction, interpretation, or practical application of textbook materials. In such instances, there is no single “correct” response possible. This emphasis on “right” might also make children reluctant to take risks in answering questions or attempting to apply information. Pearson (2011) observed this same phenomenon among her adult Cambodian trainers, labelling it as the “expectation of certainty” (p. 15) and noting that “possibilities and probabilities are not options; all information a teacher conveys is a certainty and right” (p. 14). In the Cambodian worldview, “metaphorically speaking, everything is simply white or black” (p. 15). One extended implication of this is that teachers do not ascribe real value to student knowledge and experiences. This is a direct affront to social constructivist understanding of learning which “suggests that our most important learning does not take place through the addition of discrete facts to an existing store of knowledge, but that we relate new information, new experiences, new ways of understanding to our existing understanding of the matter at hand” (Pontefract & Hardman, 2005, p. 100).

This emphasis on correct-ness also permeates the education system more generally. For example, when describing the process of being monitored by the District Training and Management Team, one teacher said: “The reason for DTMT is to correct; they tell us our
mistakes.” Further, during the first month of field-work and classroom observation, teachers frequently requested that the Lead Researcher “tell us what we do wrong so we can correct it.”

Corrective statements from teachers seemed to have the dual purpose of highlighting an instance of wrong (koh), as well as “shaming” (embarrassing) students; perhaps to be expected in an externally-oriented shame-based culture such as Cambodia. Some examples of corrective statements noted during the research period are included in Box 14 below.

**Box 14: Teacher statements, shaming and blaming students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements of shame and blame – teachers to students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Why are you acting like you don’t know anything?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To the whole class: “Why aren’t you clever? Why do you make me tell you again and again it’s like this and this?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“All students are correct except for you! Why don’t you write correctly?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Don’t ask your friends, listen to me!”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Affirmation of “correct” answers or of “good quality” work tended to be very rare and non-specific (such as: “good” (la’ah) or “very good” (la’ah nah!)). Still, the presence of such affirmation, though infrequent, is notable as it runs counter to Cambodian culture. As Pearson (2011) notes: “Criticism and blame, together with a paucity of thanks and praise, are all strong features of Cambodian social interaction, and they can result in line management relationships barren of any positive motivation” (p. 100).

In fact, teachers seemed to be struggling with a paradoxical desire to be more affirming (because they recognise that positive reinforcement can help learning) and a deeply held belief that negative affirmation is more productive and effective. As noted elsewhere, such tension can be interpreted as positive achievement as it demonstrates awareness of alternative pedagogical practices. In the same way, it is important to not underestimate teacher awareness of the value of creating a “happy,” colourful, and positive environment, one free of fear, to
promote learning. Given the traditional emphasis on hierarchy and fear of authority, this shift to the classroom level has potential for eventually enabling social transformation.

**Positive/Negative Reinforcement.** Generally, as examples in the previous section illustrate, the RT observed a strong tendency by teachers and administrators to take a negative, problem-oriented perspective toward education in contrast with a positive, appreciative perspective. In the Cambodian education context, it has been noted “advising” is positively regarded as valuable, and considered to be a form of encouragement (Courtney, 2007, p. 336). This phenomenon of a fault-finding orientation was also noted in the recent VSO (2008) study on the motivation and morale of Cambodian teachers. And paradoxically, the VSO findings showed that though teachers expressed dissatisfaction with their superiors’ failure to positively affirm and support them, these teachers in turn seldom used positive reinforcement with their own students (p. 38). As an example from Sala Phum, the Director explained his choice of topics for the daily lecture: “Even small mistakes I raise during morning assembly to keep students alert to what’s right and what’s wrong” (P-52)! And when the research team had explained its purpose and methodology, the first question from teachers was “Tell us what we are doing wrong so we can correct it.” As a second example, when asked about the purpose of the DTMT monitoring team visits, all teacher and administration respondents answered with some variation of: “they come to correct us, to tell us our mistakes.”

This “corrective” orientation extends from teachers into the classroom, and affects their orientation toward their students. Just three students of all that were interviewed at Sala Phum said their teacher praises them when they do something correct. Observation confirmed that the common practice is for teachers to do nothing when students are correct; but to quickly point out mistakes if the student responds with an incorrect answer or stumbles when reading.
In cases where teachers did affirm a student, it was for giving a correct answer and verbal praise took the simple form of either “good” or “very good!” without elaboration.

In cases where students who are called upon to read aloud stumble through the text, or have difficult sounding out words, almost always either the teacher or other students will intervene by reading aloud (and in a voice louder than normal conversation) the portion the student has difficulty with. Sometimes, if the reader is generally weak, a teacher (and often other students) will read aloud the words just in advance of the reader, so that in effect, the reader recites what the teacher says, rather than what the reader actually sees on the page.

**Student inquiry.** The research team observed that students rarely ask their teachers questions in class. When this occurred, questions related most often to instructions for performing tasks, rather than to conceptual issues. One Grade 5 teacher at Cluster school number two explained: “Children watch television a lot now, so they know more and don’t have to ask the teacher.” Another said: “Students ask each other when they don’t know, so they don’t ask the teacher so much.”

Contrary to what was observed, nearly all teachers at Sala Phum made a point of saying that they encourage questions, that their students do ask a lot of questions, and that this happens much more frequently now than it did when they themselves were in primary or secondary school. One reason given was that students now are “much more confident” and “they know more”. This shift in interaction could be regarded as a necessary, though insufficient, condition for truly inquiry-based learning.

The MoEYS CFS *Effective teaching & learning guidebook – Teacher logbook* (2007c, p. 8) contains a simplified question taxonomy consisting of three (increasingly complex) levels: memory, understanding, and critical thinking. However, there is little obvious
movement in classrooms from memory toward critical thinking. Teacher questions to students also focus mostly on (re)citing factual information. In fact, researchers seldom observed any actual recall requirements by teachers – student answers are most often read out or copied out directly from the textbook. Further, it was common practice in math classes throughout the Cluster for students to take their notebooks to the board to solve problems by using the multiplication tables printed on the back cover. Only two teachers explicitly instructed students to close their texts before answering during the entire research period.

**Group work.** Most teachers immediately identified group work as the biggest difference between traditional and current teaching models. All teachers observed by the RT used this method frequently and consistently for all subjects. Benefits as specified by teachers included: strong help weak, students share ideas, students learn to cooperate and help each other. A negative feature of groups was identified by several teachers as: “Some children must turn their back to the chalk board/front of the classroom [so they cannot see]” (I-P61). A second challenge is that “…desks don’t move easily so it is difficult to organise for group work” (I-P67).

All teachers reported that they determined group composition, which intentionally mixed boys and girls, as well as slow students and good students. Each group had a designated leader (more often a girl than a boy). Group size ranged from four to six students, depending on class size; membership did not change for the entire school year. Other than putting students into groups at the start of a year, teachers do not appear to actively manage the group learning process. Instructions were usually quite general (“answer the questions on page xx and when you are done go to the blackboard to present the answers”). Most often, 1-2 students actively engage with the assignment, while the others in the group would talk to each other or
play or simply sit listening. The group leader usually takes the role of both scribe and presenter.

Teachers were somewhat ambivalent about group work, both affirming that it is an effective teaching method, while also expressing discomfort with the level of chaos and noise generated by students in groups. Indeed, Bunry (2011) notes that there is a sharp contradiction between traditional Cambodian views on a good classroom (which equates with effective teaching and teacher professionalism) as one that is quiet and tidy, and the noisy, chaotic situation that results when students work in groups. Students themselves expressed a clear preference for group work, over individual assignments saying that they enjoyed the interaction, it helped them learn more quickly, and they could help one another.

**Classroom management.** Class management was defined by teachers primarily in terms of distracting children to help them re-focus attention. One teacher described his overall strategy as: “I manage by using sweet words, good words so that they [students] like studying” (I-P69) As for specific management activities, this teacher continued: “Sometimes when they are noisy, I tell them a story. Or we play games [hot potato, counting game] as well. And if the class is so passive, then I ask them to stand up and raise their hand, right and left to wake them up” (I-P69). Thus it seems that “management” is seen as a discrete activity, not necessarily an opportunity to apply different pedagogical tactics, but simply done to restore student focus.

When asked what she does if/when students fail to pay attention during explanation of the lesson, one Grade 4 teacher at Sala Phum said simply: “I shout at them (s’ryke owee)” (I-P60). And, she continued, “If I see them eating in class, I blame them (s’daye owee) and tell them that according to class regulations they are not allowed to eat in class.” The other Grade
4 teacher explained: “If I see my students eating in class I tell them they can stand and eat alone without learning. I stop teaching until they eat all, then we continue studying” (I-P63).

When his students got off-task and lost focus, one Grade 6 teacher at a cluster school employed a traditional mechanism called Poonyeak Aram. This is a traditional Khmer way to help wake up participants; it can be used at workshops or group events when people have been concentrating for a long time on a single task and need a break or need to be refreshed. It works like this: three volunteers each recite something different -- a story, a joke, and a riddle. In the classroom, after each volunteer completed their presentation, the class clapped loudly and vigorously. A new energy seeped into the room. Of course like any exercise, Poonyeak Aram can be more or less effective. On another day, the research team observed something similar at a different school in the cluster, except there it appeared to be a case of see moung or literally “to eat the hour” (that is, the exercise has no didactic purpose and was just used to “fill up the time”).

Most/all classrooms have a “policy statement”, or list of rules posted at the front of the classroom, an example of which is shown in Box 15 below. With only slight variation, rules in all classrooms mirrored this list from a cluster school. Emphasis is on tidiness, neatness, and the external environment, rather than attitudinal or relational traits, and guidelines are not related to “learning” per se.

**Box 15: Example of class policy at a cluster school**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class policy (cluster school)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Put garbage in the can.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do not stand on desks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Do not eat snacks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Put all materials in order when you leave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Erase the blackboard when class is done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Do not write on desks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Do not spit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Do not put dirty hands on the walls.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Given these observations, it may not be surprising to note that typical Cambodian teachers do not receive much official training or instruction about pedagogy or about classroom management. The bulk of the curriculum for primary school teachers’ 2-year pre-service training is allocated to teaching subject content rather than pedagogical processes; no time is devoted to exploring education philosophy/ies. Officially, the curriculum consists of six subject areas: knowledge about children (108 hrs.); classroom environment (85 hrs. on “administration” and “professional ethics”); strengthening knowledge (534 hrs. on five core subjects); primary education-related knowledge (883 hrs. on eight topics including “research in library” and “teaching aid development”); teaching methodology (518 hrs. – 83 for “general pedagogy” and the remainder divided over four specific subjects); and a 10-week practicum in the final semester. The total number of hours is 2,127 plus the practicum which amounts to 265 8-hour days over a 2-year period, plus 50 days for practicum or a total of 315 days of instruction out of 730 days available (Duthilleul, 2005).

Furthermore, it is clearly recognised, and documented, that in-service teacher training/professional development is an ad hoc endeavour in Cambodia and heavily dependent on foreign funding initiatives (I-P40; VSO, 2008; World Education, 2010). In fact, according to the MoEYS’s own data (EMIS 2004), less than one percent of all teachers attend in-service training in any school year (Benveniste, Marshall & Araujo, 2008, p. 25), and what in-service training is conducted by MoEYS frequently consists simply of introducing new textbooks. Teachers are thus likely to manage their classrooms as they have seen modeled at the Ministry’s Teacher Training Centre which exhibits a strong bent toward “knowledge transfer” (Duthilleul, 2005, p. 98), in part “because there is too much information to tell them and not enough time” (I-P40, male authority in teacher training department). As Duthilleul (p. 98)
summarises: “In Cambodia today, most teachers have weak subject matter knowledge, they have limited pedagogical content knowledge, limited knowledge about how to adapt teaching strategies to individual student learning needs, and limited opportunities for practice and reflection among peers.”

**Focus on Form/Formula.** Overall, in primary school classes there is a distinct emphasis on “form” (and formulaic answers), neatness, and proper behaviour. A premium is placed on neat handwriting which is frequently equated both by teachers and students with “knowledge” and “being smart.” Without good penmanship, grades are lowered, which penalizes good students whose only fault is less-than-perfect handwriting.  

A second example is that students are encouraged to read for flow rather than comprehension; they are graded on “how beautiful it sounds” and whether or not they have proper inflection, not on how much they actually understand of the text.

A clear example of tendency toward [eliciting] formulaic responses comes from a grade 6 cluster school teacher who when teaching about child rights asked her class, “What do children have to do in future?” To which the students responded: “Develop your country! Take care of your parents because your parents have taken care of you! Children are bamboo shoots!” In a follow-up, the teacher asked: “How do we develop our nation?” and students shout in unison: “Work hard, study hard, respect the law, join the army!” A second example comes from the student focus-group discussion where, when asked why they go to school, all participating girl students responded immediately with a unison rhyme: “Chong che mayrien, chong che anh, chong che sadap, chong cham” [want to learn, want to read, want to listen, want to remember].

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40 Interestingly, when reading through the essays, the Khmer RA also immediately equated neatness, good spelling and grammar with quality, rather than assessing actual content.
In the essay competition at Sala Phum School this same preoccupation surfaced. Three classes were instructed to write an essay “describing in as much detail as you can, your average school day” and three classes were asked to write an essay stating their favourite subject and why it was their favourite subject. Many children wrote that they sompheak their parents when they leave for school in the morning, they greet their teacher with “chum riep suah neak kru/lok kru”, and they say “chum riep suah” when they return home after class. Participants paid great attention to describing (ideal) respectful behaviour, often incorporating the rules of the classroom verbatim into their essays (writing, for instance: “I don’t eat snacks in class,” and “I don’t talk to my friends when the teacher is talking,” or “I focus very hard on the teacher talking.”).

**Using additional materials.** Few teachers utilise educational materials other than the blackboard, chalk, and students’ notebooks during normal teaching (*rien twamadah*). Teachers who had been asked, and prepared, to “teach CFS” did use additional resources and asked students to engage in different activities. The one teacher who performed a science lesson for the Cluster School monthly training day utilised flashcards, posted a diagram on the board, held up other posters, had students work as individuals and in pairs, and had the pairs write on A4 paper which they later posted on the chalkboard. At this training event, one teacher explained that the lessons taught during the event are supposed to be new for the children, but that the teachers/ students have a few days notice to prepare “so that they can be familiar with the activities and the teaching will go easily.” Bunry (2011) observed the same phenomenon – that teachers alter classroom behaviour when they know they are being observed, and she interprets this as teachers selectively applying CFS as a survival strategy.
Five teachers at Sala Phum also used additional materials on the day they demonstrated CFS to the research team. However, at Sala Phum, materials brought into class consisted primarily of slips of paper and flipchart sheets onto which aspects of the lesson had been copied ahead of time directly from the textbook. One Grade 4 teacher varied from this norm, spending most of the CFS class time (a Khmer Language lesson) encouraging her students to act out various verbs. Another extraordinary use of materials in a “CFS class” was exhibited by a Grade 5 teacher who brought in several objects (globe, tape roll, ping pong ball, ruler) with which to demonstrate “friction” for a science lesson.

**Discipline in the classroom**

This section describes various elements of discipline as they occur in a Cambodian primary school classroom today. In summary, teachers are clearly passionate about their desire for students to know and understand the materials being taught; and they believe that using corporal punishment will facilitate learning. However, they know they are not allowed to employ corporal punishment. The fact that teachers feel they have no effective alternatives results in a sense of disempowerment and frustration.

**Violence/corporal punishment.** Most teachers themselves relayed stories of physical punishment they received when they were in primary school. Some who are a generation older, especially females, reported being so afraid of physical punishment (“because there was blood!”) that it prohibited them from attending any school at all. Indeed, the 1950s and 1960s were, by all accounts, the period during which corporal punishment was most violent and most types of punishment reported as being experienced by teachers themselves included: kneeling on spiky dried jackfruit skin, running around the school yard, standing in the sun with bricks balanced on outstretched arms, being hit with a bamboo rod across the
back, ears twisted/pinched, and striking fingertips with a thin bamboo rod. Most often, they were punished for incorrect answers, failure to hand in assignments, or for contravening school policy such as coming late to class or not paying attention to the teacher.

Many made a direct and positive connection between physical punishment and their own learning saying that they learned better and faster when threatened with physical punishment, therefore, in their minds, “we have no choice.” Teachers gave many examples of how the current attitudes toward children and policy about child rights negatively impact learning. For instance, one teacher explained that “If compared to now, [too] small children and other children not really learn well because the teacher has no way to force them to learn; teachers just talk.” (I-P52).

Though it was the normative view, not everyone made a positive connection between violence and high achievement. A youth currently studying in university (22 years old) spoke from his personal experience: “Hot [i.e. violence] is not better for children, it makes you feel not safe! When teacher praised me it made me want to go back to school next day and ask more questions!” (I-P27). And one mother in a caregiver focus group conceded: “To explain to children is maybe a better way, but to use/hit violence is more effective!”

So perhaps it is not surprising that teachers are ambivalent about discipline (vik naye) generally, and particularly corporal punishment. Although it was banned in 1996-97, corporal punishment is still occasionally employed by teachers, as confirmed by several of the teachers themselves, and by many students, with the common statement: “Sometimes the teacher hits (vye).” In one parent focus group, a mother explained that: “Teachers still hit students but not so strong, and [now they] hit only someone who knows absolutely nothing. Not as strong [violent] as in the colony time.” (I-P14). In regard to being disciplined at home, most students
said that they received corporal punishment from their caregivers/parents; in all cases where students acknowledged physical punishment at home, they reported that punishment at home is much stronger, more severe than what is meted out in school. Recent studies concur that corporal punishment of children by parents or caregivers is common in Cambodian families (Courtney, 2008; Ketchum, 2008; Miles, 2008).

Events described as meriting punishment were not consistent across the teaching corps. For instance, a few indicated that if students are late they “do nothing,” just let the students into the classroom because they are happy the students have come at all; while others said that they required late students to perform an embarrassing activity (such as making animal noises) so that they would not be late in the future. Some teachers say they try to ignore it when students get noisy or unruly in class. Others said that they shout if students get loud and go off task.

Negative reinforcement (punishment) is regarded by teachers (and parents and students themselves) as more useful, more effective at soliciting behaviour change than is positive reinforcement (reward, encouragement). One student clearly stated: “I like to receive praise; but hitting (vye) makes me learn more quickly” (G-P48). Still, teachers are obviously conflicted, volunteering that they know they should use “sweet words” (I-P59) so that students are not fearful of the teacher or school; but also adamantly asserting that “punishment” is the only way to “control students” and to “make them learn.” (I-P60; I-P63)

**Shaming and threatening.** Teachers described hitting/corporal punishment as anomalous behaviour: more often, they said that they would either “do nothing” or else “use words” to correct students. When asked for actual detailed examples of discipline they have administered, “blaming” students (sedye owee) actually emerged as the most frequent response and “shouting” (s’ryke) was next most common. “Shaming” takes the form of making the
offending student stand at the front of the class, or the teacher asking an embarrassing question of a single student (such as: “everyone else knows the answer but you do not, why not?”). As an example: “[I tell the children] in order not to waste your time and money spent on supplies, and to answer to what your parents did for you [your parents raised you, you owe them a debt of gratitude] you must study hard” (I-P66).

More common than actual application of corporal punishment, children indicated that their teachers use the threat of physical discipline to deter bad behaviour. This is in the form of hitting the desk with a stick; telling children they will be hit if they do not comply with teacher’s request; telling students they will be sent to the Director if they do not stop their inappropriate behaviour.

**Blaming.** Teachers at Sala Phum tended to assign responsibility for learning solely on the individual student/s, and seemed reluctant to take the responsibility themselves; in fact, teachers blame several stakeholders for student failure to learn/achieve – students themselves, other teachers, school authorities, the central Ministry of Education. This appears to be a common response throughout Cambodia. In a recent CITA study (2011) of 726 respondents, teachers identified “limited ability and knowledge of students” (8.7 percent) and “students do not pay attention in study” (7.2 percent) as two reasons for poor quality education. Bernard (2008, p. 32) also notes that most teachers “continue to see their main challenges as external to themselves e.g. their low pay; students’ poor punctuality and frequent absences; lack of teaching and learning materials; a curriculum too heavy to ‘get across’ to the children.”

School Director/s tend to blame teachers for being lazy; and to blame the community for not caring about education and specifically for not raising sufficient money for better facilities. As a one Director (I-P52) explained: “There are many reasons for not achieving

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41 This idea of an over-loaded curriculum was echoed by several teachers at Sala Phum.
CFS. The first one is community. Unless the community helps and donates money [we will not achieve].” And, MoEYS staff tend to blame administrators for misunderstanding what they are told by central MoEYS authorities and to blame teachers for poor student achievement results. For instance, “They [teachers] don’t practice what we tell them; they are not serious; they don’t care; they have bad attitude” (I-A4).

**Student assessment**

Student assessment was identified by an expatriate educator engaged in teacher training as one of the most difficult aspects of the teaching profession (I-P106). She noted that teachers she worked with had a very difficult time understanding the concept of using objective criteria for assessing learning; her observation accurately portrayed student assessment at Sala Phum.

The concept of having set criteria, of actually breaking down what a test is, and what it measures, that’s very difficult [for teachers here to grasp]. Everything is marked out of 10…sometimes they ask an awful lot of a few marks, and then something else gets just a few points. A lot of testing is just simple factual recall. There doesn’t seem to be much concept of “what are we actually testing?” (I-P106)

As one Sala Phum Grade 4 teacher explained:

When students get their scores, sometimes they ask – given that their work is good but why do others get 10 marks and they get only 9 marks? So, 10 marks means full score and perfect which I only give if your work is good and no erasing. So for the students who have erasing, in order to distinguish them from another, I must reduce one mark.”

**Assessing achievement and learning.** Each teacher has a very large official grade book from MoEYS in which class details are carefully recorded by hand; each teacher also has a similar sized official attendance record book. When asked why attendance was important to track/record, since formally attendance is not included as part of any assessment grade, one Grade 5 teacher explained that it is a way to protect teachers from parents: “Sometimes they
send their child to school but their child does not come to school; I want to show them their child did not come to school, I don’t want them to blame me” (I-P65).

A passing mark is 5/10 for any assignment or exam; anything less than 5.0 is a failing mark. In primary school, students are given an exam each month and they are given an end-of-semester exam (two end-of-semester exams in one school year). The exam content is devised by individual teacher/s and is not a centrally-administered event. One Grade 5 teacher admitted that he sometimes (re)uses his own old tests; he doesn’t make up entirely new tests for each month or semester. There are several exams administered, depending on how the teacher organises the process. For instance the subject of Khmer language can be divided into sub-components of reading, listening, conversation, and writing; math is divided into diagrams and calculations (details depend on the grade level); then there are the subjects of social studies, history, and science. For all subjects, it was difficult for teachers to explain what, specifically, they were testing on, and how they design their tests except to say that they frequently take questions directly from the teacher guidebook. The idea of assessing student knowledge and comprehension using anything other than a paper and pencil did not appear to be an option that teachers entertained.

A student’s final mark is simply the average of a student’s marks achieved on monthly tests. Each month the teacher gives a single mark/grade for each “subject”; this mark is the result of a single quiz or test administered at some point during the month. Sometimes students are told in advance when they will have the quiz/test and other times they are not informed. Teachers give their class gradebook to the Vice Director monthly; he re-calculates the figures to make sure that the averages are correct; then signs and stamps each month’s page. Nothing else is done with the information.
Assessing reading ability. There is no standard or list of criteria against which to assess a student’s reading ability. Students are graded purely on ability to read aloud; that is, not for comprehension but merely saying the words correctly. “Fluency” (fluidity – how smoothly a student can read, without hesitation or stops) is a major element that all teachers reported listening for when a student reads aloud. This includes flow (do students read without stopping), clarity (crisp pronunciation), and the third variable is “intonation” (do they follow the punctuation and word flow appropriately).

Final exams. At Sala Phum, final exams are designed by the two teachers responsible for each grade (a/b). Until two years ago, the practice was for all grades within a specific Cluster to confer with each other to devise the tests. However, this had recently discontinued, “because it is up to the Cluster Director to direct us to cooperate or not” (I-P70). There is apparently no official standard against which to determine if the tests are “good” (that is, they address an appropriate range and difficulty of material covered in class; types of questions posed; etc.). Teachers said they tend to pick questions directly from the teacher’s guidebook for the exam, and directly from the student textbook, rather than to make up questions themselves. One teacher explained: “It is easier and faster than making up questions. We can just choose [from what there is]” (I-P66). Another teacher volunteered that they do sometimes change the figures in questions (but the format of the question is one that the students will have already had in class) because students can easily buy teacher guide books in the market, books that have all questions completed.

Teachers reported that the final exam tests only material from the second semester; thus there is no comprehensive exam covering the whole year’s subject matter. Given that final exams occur significantly in advance of the official end of the school year, it is perhaps not
surprising that most teachers report being unable to complete all content in every textbook by the time of final exams: commonly, 2-3 chapters have not been covered by that time. Several, though not all, teachers indicated that usually there is more material covered in the book than they can put on the test anyway, so it doesn’t matter that they don’t include questions about the chapters not completed during the semester (Sala Phum Grade 3 teacher, field notes).

Theoretically, this could result in an accumulated loss of a significant amount of information/material by the time a child completed Grade 6. And, as teachers are independently responsible to devise tests, and have no standard against which to work, the results across schools cannot be compared. There is an assumption made, at national level, that when a student passes to the next grade, that they have all the information, content, material from the previous year at their disposal. However, this may not actually be the case at all.

At Sala Phum, by the first week of July, students had sat for their final exams and marks for the whole year submitted to the Cluster School. The teachers explained that the Cluster required grades to be in by 20 June each year (a full 6 weeks before the official end of the school year, which is 30 July). Thus, after administering the final exam, teachers simply reviewed lessons for another 3-4 weeks, at which time the Director announced the official end of the school year. During that last month, researchers noted that attendance averaged half or less, the total number of students in each class.

The main reason for giving the final exam so early, is that school results must pass through four levels before 30 July: school to Cluster; Cluster to District; District to Province (DoE); and finally to the central MoEYS office in Phnom Penh. Each level must consolidate the information it receives. As there is seldom electricity in rural areas, no budget for
photocopying, and no computers in MoEYS offices until the Province level (and even then, not consistently), records are laboriously copied by hand numerous times.

Furthermore, the official Grade 9 exam (to pass from Lower Secondary up to the next level, Upper Secondary or High School - Grade 10) is routinely scheduled for 4-5 July; and the national Grade 12 exam is routinely scheduled for ~20 July. These major national exams take precedence over all other school activities. So primary school teachers and administrators, as well as police and other formal authorities, are mobilised to monitor/invigilate and primary school classrooms are commandeered which would anyway halt the possibility of primary school classes continuing through

**Ranking students by score achieved.** “Ranking” of students within a class is official government policy in Cambodia: the official RGC grade-book reserves a column for this figure. A Grade 5 teacher at Sala Phum said: “It’s an encouragement for good students. Ranking is good for them” (I-P64). When pressed about how “poor students” might feel, the teacher replied: “This is a reminding way for bad students, they need to do better.” And, the teacher also suggested that another benefit was that “It helps the teacher to help poor/bad students.” This teacher’s perspective differed from students’ perspective. Students who are ranked in the top half of their class generally “feel good” while those ranked in the bottom “feel sad.”

While the CFS official guidelines suggest using a student portfolio to demonstrate change/learning over time, and also to foster student self-assessment, neither of these forms of assessment are employed at Sala Phum.

**Student progress books.** Student progress books are printed by the MoEYS. Table 29 below provides a sample of the type of information included in these books. They are
completed by a teacher and are supposed to be sent home monthly with students to give to their parents. Parents/caregivers are expected to review the content with the child, comment in the section allocated for this, and then return the book to the teacher via the student within one week. The actual frequency with which any of this occurs is not consistent across classes at Sala Phum, though it is fairly regular.

Table 29: Sample of student progress book

| SUBJECT                      | Grade         | PROBLEMS MUST HELP MORE
|------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------
|                              | (La’aa) 8-10  | (Bangkua) 6.5-7.99       |
| Reading                      |               | (Machum) 5-6.49          |
| Essay                        |               | (Kasowee) 4.99-0         |
| Dictation                    |               |                          |
| Poetry                       |               |                          |
| Story                        |               |                          |
| Grammar                      |               |                          |
| Vocabulary                   |               |                          |
| Penmanship                   |               |                          |
| Math (simple)                |               |                          |
| Math (geometry)              |               |                          |
| Science                      |               |                          |
| History                      |               |                          |
| Geography                    |               |                          |
| Morality                     |               |                          |
| Art/drawing                  |               |                          |
| Singing & dance              |               |                          |
| Foreign language             |               |                          |
| (English & French)           |               |                          |
| Handicrafts                  |               |                          |
| Phys. Ed.                    |               |                          |

Average / rank in class / score (neatee / # times absent with permission and without permission / morality (vinay and seletowah = behaviour in class)

All of the 147 student progress books reviewed by researchers covered grades for a 4-month period (November 2010 through February 2011 inclusive: though officially the semester of each new academic year starts in October, because of the extensive P’chum Ben holiday in October, many schools don’t actually have classes until November). Only one of

42 This is the column in which teachers are supposed to write their comments about student performance.
the six teachers made any comments, and he made the exact same comment to 16/27 students. That repeated comment (“Please help to teach more” (some chewy bong rien bun thyme)) was usually made multiple times to the same student. The other statement was simply: “Please help to teach more at home.” Details about parent comments are included below in Table 30.

**Pass/fail.** Several teachers at Sala Phum expressed an understanding that the government wants 90 percent of students to pass into the next grade – and therefore, teachers are obligated to give the RGC these results. One Grade 5 teacher explained that sometimes he does give students better marks than they have earned/deserve because he has to comply with this progression number as required by the RGC. He estimated that there are as many as seven such cases in each class. While this teacher is keenly aware that the students he is passing cannot read well, and knows that they are not prepared for the next grade, he feels he has no choice but to pass them. He explained that he too receives some students each year who have been promoted due to this quota system, and that he can’t do much with them because they have “weak foundation” (I-P63).

A Grade 4 teacher relayed a similar story: “Sometimes I add to the score” to make sure that 90 percent of students pass and move up to the next grade. She said these are the instructions they have from the Ministry of Education. In her 20+ years of teaching, this teacher has failed just two students. This situation was corroborated on two separate occasions by all the Sala Phum administrators. However, it was vehemently denied by the Director of the Teacher Training Centre in Kampong Cham (and her colleagues) who blamed schools and teachers for having “misunderstood” the MoEYS goal of a 90 percent pass-rate, and for mis-interpreting it as a policy or centrally-driven mandate (I-P41).
Children on the playground

The most noticeable thing about children on the playground during break times is that a majority of students at Sala Phum engaged in play – and that most playground activity is strictly gender-segregated. Boys played a greater range of games than did girls; when asked about which games boys play and which girls play, and why the difference, the children responded with very quick and clear rationale. Generally, boy games played by boys are more physically active, rough, require greater strength and speed, and take “greater skill” than games favoured by girls. See Chapter Seven for details on games children play.

Teachers usually clustered in a group on the veranda outside the office during break and were seldom observed interacting with children. In fact, no teacher was intentionally designated to watch children at recess time. And more often than not, female teachers grouped together and male teachers grouped together.

Parental expectations and involvement

Apart from ensuring that children physically get to school, very few parents interact in any way with their children’s formal education. Reported types of interaction included: talking to the teacher during class time about a problem the child has, telling the teacher their child will be absent from class, reading/responding to the grade book which is sent home monthly, assisting child with their homework, telling/encouraging/forcing (all three verbs were used interchangeably by parents and by children) child to complete homework and to go to school, and participating on the School Committee.

The student progress books serve as an illustration of the nature of the relationship between parents and teachers, as well as prevailing perceptions of children and what they lack/need. The RT reviewed 147 student progress books covering a period of four months.
Few parents responded: just 32/147 made a total of 59 remarks to the teacher. Many parents simply said something to the effect of: “Thank you for teaching my child.” One reason for the response rate, and simplicity of responses, may be that in rural Cambodia, many parents are illiterate; or if literate, may not be confident enough about their handwriting or spelling to actually write something to a teacher. Examples of other statements are included in Table 30 below. Nearly all comments seem to place responsibility for student learning and conduct squarely on the shoulders of teachers. The general nature of comments suggests too, lack of familiarity with subject content and children’s actual (comparative) progress.

**Table 30: Parent comments in student progress books**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments written by parents in student progress books</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Teacher please encourage more on the lacking points [deficiencies] of my child (chewy chumrun bun thyme le chumnut kwkhnt).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Please push/help my child (chewy chumrun bun thyme).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Please help give advice (some chewy pva-dow pong(^{43})).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Teacher please help my child learn/study more (som chewy bong rien bun thyme).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Thank you teacher for your compassion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Thank you teacher that you help to teach my child to become good (bong rien owei baan la’a).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Teacher please help to teach this child more because my child knows nothing (aht che, aht dung). Thank you in advance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Teacher please do violence (ludt veeya) more for my child because she/he does not study hard.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A recent quantitative study that explored factors associated with low educational achievement, cautions against rushing to judgment for Cambodia on the impact of low parental involvement in the academic endeavours of their children. Rather, Eng (2010) suggests that parents’ active academic involvement, often found to be associated with academic achievement among children in Western societies, may not have the same influence in Cambodia. Alternatively Eng suggests that “…parents’ academic aspirations, a form of social capital in

\(^{43}\) This term is stronger than nye noam; and the word pong is commonly used for emphasis or for politeness.
family, are the most important factor in students’ academic achievement” (p. 77). In other words, more focus could be given to promoting parents’ academic aspirations (and other forms of social capital including attitudes toward gender roles, attitudes toward fate, and labour demands) than to requiring direct and active participation in school planning or in academics per se, which are the current focus of “participation” for the aim of improving academic achievement.

**Analysing Local Negotiation**

There are distinct differences between the way that major educational stakeholders comprising MoEYS understand and negotiate the concept of Child Friendly Schools, as well as significant differences between MoEYS and international NGOs in how CFS is understood. In this sense, the identity of “local” is a moving target and depends upon the designated referent. The two main levels or situated “locals” for Cambodia’s MoEYS, then, as compared to the global, are MoEYS policy-makers at the central or national level (this includes MoEYS as officials at intermediate or provincial and district level/s), and then MoEYS in the form of individuals tasked with actually implementing CFS in schools and classrooms, that is, teachers and administrators. For both levels, there appears to be genuine appreciation for the possibilities that CFS affords to improve quality of education, though not commensurate appreciation of CFS philosophical or theoretical underpinnings. Neither is there sufficient technical capacity for implementation of this somewhat open-ended and flexible educational frame. The central and intermediate levels also can be characterised as a particularly rigid and punitive, rather than helpfully flexible and supportive of those who are actually responsible for implementing this policy set on a daily and immediate basis.
At all three levels, CFS is largely regarded as a particular “method” (“what”) of teaching, rather than as an “approach” (“how”). Also, with CFS there is a tendency to focus on visible indicators of compliance with external standards, such as keeping the school yard clean and walls bedecked with posters, a strong association of CFS with form rather than function. Teachers and administrators exhibit a shallow grasp of the underlying philosophy and related concepts. There is a propensity to use appropriate technical terminology, such as “student centred learning”, “gender equality”, “group work”, and so forth, but there is minimal evidence of a deep appreciation for the fundamental meaning and rationale behind these key terms.

Current practice of formal basic education is characterised by a system-wide preoccupation with “form” (image) rather than “function” (learning). Sometimes this emphasis appears to simply be a reflex; other times it seems very intentional; it could also be the result of limited understanding of a particular concept; or perhaps it is just the result of lack of awareness about the true purpose or nature of an activity. And in several instances, it appears that a clash of culturally-based social values is the reason for the particularly local (Cambodian) version of implementation. These various challenges are identified and described in Chapter 8 as: historical, aid system, epistemological, pedagogical, logistical, socio-cultural, and political challenges. An example of this would be the form “community participation” has taken – in even the highest achieving CFS schools in Cambodia communities are not engaged at planning level, though they do raise funds and proudly support schools. A second example is the highly centralised way that schools are monitored by a District-level Monitoring Team – this is antithetical to the nature of CFS as decentralised, democratic, and responsive to local settings. And, there are many ways in which locally practiced pedagogy contrasts sharply with globalised ideals of learner-centred, inquiry-based instruction.
It is difficult to ascribe an accurate degree of intentionality to any particular stakeholder’s response to CFS: to know, for instance, whether a response results from a lack of understanding of the philosophical basis for certain actions, or lack of capacity to actually implement a prescribed feature, or any number of other reasons. In some instances limited implementation can clearly be attributed to resource and logistical short-comings: there are insufficient materials for use in a classroom; teachers are not paid an adequate wage so they do not do the extra work required of them, and so forth. So then, are these “short-comings” to be interpreted as wilful contestation, reflexive behaviour, or simply the result of ignorance?

At the central or national level, MOEYS rationale for adopting CFS appears to consist of at least three components. First, there is widespread recognition that the Cambodian public education system is of low quality and something must be done – no local options have presented themselves so an international model is adopted. Second, CFS comes with significant funding resources and technical advice. Third, Cambodians are very conscious of wanting to appear competent on the regional and global stage and do not want to be regarded as “backward” and “not modern” which they see would be the result of refusal to adopt CFS.

**Values in conflict**

In seeking to understand how local teachers and parents understand and negotiate the concepts of Child Friendly Schools it is important to recognise that two of the three original “pillars” (child rights and constructivist learning) are not unproblematic as a starting point, nor is the democratising aim of CFS unproblematic. CFS is intended to facilitate operationalisation of “child rights” as Cambodia is a signatory of the UN-CRC. In *The Middle Way*, researchers concluded that values underlying the UN-CRC and Cambodian cultural values are “distinctly different, if not diametrically opposed to one another” (2009, p. 13) and
that this is a major factor in the “failure” to implement and internalise child rights despite two
decades of vigorous promotion. The report identifies six clashing value sets, which are equally
relevant in the education sector. Where the UN-CRC promotes “equality” in relationships,
Cambodians organise around a strict “hierarchy”. “Honour” (saving face) is a more important
value than the “transparency” emphasised by a child-rights perspective. Khmer gender norms
strongly favour patriarchy and accord greater value to males, whilst “gender equity” is a
cornerstone of the UN’s human rights framework. Three more sets of conflicting values
identified in *The Middle Way* include “empowerment (Western) vs. patronage (Cambodian);”
“justice vs. harmony;” and where Western “individualism” regards accomplishing things
independently as a virtue, Cambodians place a premium on “collectivism” which valorises the
wellbeing of family and group, even at the expense of the individual.

This values clash is also clearly displayed in local response to the democratising aim of
CFS – and its focus on the individual. Given the hierarchical nature of social organisation and
the fact teachers and administrators themselves do not experience this sort of operational
environment in pre-service or in-service training, nor in school and classroom monitoring as
conducted by DTMT, it is difficult to know how they can be expected to perform like that
themselves.

- The head monk at the local *wat* who described one of the primary roles of his
  religious institution as, “We teach people to know their own station and to respect
  others” (I-P76).
- The Sala Phum Secretary said “We send reports up, but we receive only silence”. He
  continued that the only time they get any feedback is when documents are
  “wrong” and must be “corrected.” (I-P56).
- School administrators recognised that “When we do reports we must respect
  [MoEYS] conditions and requirements” (I-P56). One of these requirements
  pertained to pass/fail rate. The school’s administrators understood that they were
  required to pass 90 percent of all students: “If we say only 85 percent pass, they
  will not accept our report and they will send it back and we need to correct it” (I-
P56).
There is a heavy reliance on, and nearly uncritical acceptance of central authorities. This is expressed in many ways in the educational enterprise, large and small. For instance, as children, three Sala Phum teachers themselves had their names and/or birth dates altered by teachers in primary school, and had never rectified the errors, because as one teacher explained, “No choice, it is written in the book” (I-P71).

To recognise the conflict occurring at such a fundamental level is not to say that altering externalities, for instance – increasing pay, lengthening instructional time, providing more materials, and movement toward higher levels of professionalism – would have little or no impact on policy adoption. However, it does strongly suggest that focusing on “externalities” exclusively, or even primarily, is unlikely to achieve desired results. Attention to values must be more intentionally integrated into capacity development initiatives; as must creation of “safe spaces” where actors can be guided in reflection necessary to identify and discuss such basic differences. As Gourley (2009) concludes, “…the competing values and expectations of the two sides make it difficult to reach a common understanding of the situation and therefore act as an obstacle to sustainable attitudinal and behavioural change” (p. 19) and especially if neither side recognises the presence of competing values and expectations. O’Leary’s (2006) study on the influence of values on the development practice of Cambodian NGO workers also found that when [local] values are in conflict with international value norms, the international values are neither well articulated nor genuinely promoted because they are not actually internalised nor believed.

This evidence and results of this kind of values clash, and the results of failure to contextualise foreign models, are common in the health sector too. One example may suffice. A recent study of a peer education project, designed specifically to address the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people, found that:
Peer education was implemented as if it were a directly transferable method, rather than a process to be rooted in specific social and political contexts. Consequently, peer-education concepts of empowerment and participation conflicted with hierarchical traditions and local power relations concerning gender and poverty; peer educators were trained to deliver messages developed by adults; and interventions were not designed to reflect the social dynamics of youth peer groups. (Knibbs & Price, 2009, p. 39)

In some cases, it seems that international principles are not rejected, nor do they necessarily clash with Cambodian values, as much as they are appropriated by existing power-brokers. The result, however, is similar: varying degree/s of cognitive dissonance by parties on both sides of the equation, inability for action according to the international norm/s because of a hybrid interpretation of them, as well as failure to benefit the intended (marginalised) populations, and frustration for those attempting to impose the international norms. Multiple elements of Cambodian political culture support this claim of the clash of local values and international principles. For instance, Springer’s (2010) identification of the varying articulation/s of neoliberalism in the Global South illustrates this well: “Although the international financial institutions initially promoted neoliberal economics in the global South, powerful elites were happy to oblige. Neoliberalism frequently reveals opportunities for well-connected officials to informally control market and material rewards….” (p. 2554). In Cambodia’s case, Springer explains: “the patronage system has allowed local elites to co-opt, transform, and (re)articulate neoliberal reforms through a framework which asset strips public resources, thereby increasing people’s exposure to corruption, coercion, and violence” (p. 2554). Or as Lilja & Ojendal (2009) state more simply: “the ‘democratic’ system of governance installed in Cambodia differs considerably from the ideal of liberal democracy and the result is an atypical system” (p. 301).
Lilja & Ojendal (2009) give practical examples of what they call “hybrid democracy” (p. 303) as it exists in Cambodia today:

…research has shown that the discourses and practices of patron-client relations in Cambodia are interlaced with the democratic discourse…and that those who were regarded as leaders in the old system of rule continue to be decision makers in the contemporary democratic system. In addition, the kinship-based social organisation of Cambodian society has become mixed with the new liberal democracy, creating a hybrid system in which political participation is steered partly by family connections. (p. 302)

Viewed from an educational perspective, it is possible to see that conflicting values will influence not only how teachers perceive and interact with children, but how the entire educational system is organised. For instance, neither gender equality nor critical thinking are likely to be actively promoted within a (patriarchal) neo-patrimonial system. Further,

The teacher embedding constructive learning in the classroom draws upon the individual diversity of every child and their own local knowledge and culture. It appears questionable that government introducing the concept of child-centred learning are thinking along these lines. It seems more likely that they want pupils to achieve basic competences that will contribute to a more economically productive country. If this is the case, there is a need for more pedagogical discussion. (Courtney, 2008, p. 558).

Tan (2007) concurs that from the central level, “the overriding aim of schooling in Cambodia is the development of human capital for the economic progress of Cambodia” (p. 16). This is in direct contrast to the expressed desires and aspirations of caregivers and parents for their children. Without doubt, caregivers desire a decent standard of living for the youngsters in their care; however, their aspirations are much bigger than this as they also believe that formal education should be a site of moral inculcation and character development. These two agenda are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but the prevailing socio-political culture is not conducive to the locally-relevant, holistic education that parents desire.
A 5-point explanatory response frame

This research examined the extent and nature of local negotiation of globalised discourses and discovered responses in complex layers. Many ideas and practices introduced to Cambodia for application in various sectors by the global aid network (and beyond that by institutions comprising the global governance network) have been institutionalised in the form of policy, but not internalised as practice. Here it is worth noting that not all responses are necessarily intentionally premeditated. Wells (2005, p. 110) uses the metaphor of the game of telephone to demonstrate that meanings change as words/concepts are passed from person to person, level to level and that the only one who really knows the entirety of the original word/idea is the one who started the game. Some of the local outworking of the decisions to adopt globalised discourse is dependent upon the motive for uptake; the material context also plays a role in how much or how well implementation can occur. Even at the central level, where external pressure for adoption of foreign ideals and concepts is overtly coercive, it is possible to discern indigenous rationale quite apart from exogenous pressures to conform to global orthodoxies.

It is important to distinguish two major levels of respondents in the Cambodia context – the national (MoEYS) level and the local (school) level. Reaction differs between these two levels. None of the major stakeholders are ignoring CFS, though implementation forms and styles vary widely, as does the extent of compliance with its original aims. Even individuals who have not received formal training are aware of some of the key elements of the Child Friendly School framework. In other words, how implementers understand and do CFS depends to a large extent upon which level they stand. Responses may also appear to be different because they are in relation to different aspects of the globalised discourse – for
instance, reaction to underlying philosophy, ambitions/goals, strategies or to structures, processes, techniques (Phillips & Ochs, 2004, p. 779).

The five main responses from key education sector stakeholders to the CFS educational policy (and attendant discourse) in Cambodia are: deployment, incorporation, adaptation, contestation, and resistance. These responses do not occur in a linear or necessarily progressive fashion; not all stakeholders demonstrate all or even most of these forms of response. It is also important to note that CFS comes to these teachers as a whole package rather than as individual pieces. And individual teachers may respond to various elements of it somewhat differently based on personal experience or training. There is not one way that all teachers respond to the “child rights” discourse, for instance. There are multiple ways this discourse is reflected in proposed practices – and thus multiple ways in which teachers respond to it. See Appendix 11 for a summary of examples of each type of response.

**Deployment**: CFS is deployed – in the sense of being “utilised, arranged for deliberate purpose” with great effect at the national level in Cambodia. One deliberate purpose appears to be the financial incentives that accompany global campaigns like Child Friendly Schools (and EFA, etc.). Another reason for adopting CFS is that it appeals to the strong desire both for modernity (on the Cambodian stage), as well as being seen to be modern and trendy (on the regional and even global stage). This is not to say that the decision to adopt was/is “phoney” (Phillips & Ochs, 2003, p. 455) as the desire to actually modernise is so very real, and the energy and resources expended toward building the CFS structure are too great to be artifice.

Deployment also occurs at individual and school level. Teachers and administrators understand CFS to be an activity (or set of activities) rather than an approach to education. Thus they “do CFS” when specifically instructed or required to by superiors. In this case,
implementation can be seen as a teacher survival strategy. Related to this is preparation of lesson plans. Teachers are required to have such documents prepared for one class per day; very few teachers averaged even one per week. However, most had kept lesson plans from previous trainings (some they have prepared themselves, some were done jointly, some were examples provided by the trainer), and kept a folder of them in their classroom to take out and show inspectors when required. Another example of deployment at the classroom level is the regular collection of simple anthropometric data from students. This data is displayed by the entrance to all classrooms: but it is never actually calculated, analysed, or utilised. Few teachers even knew that it could be analysed to demonstrate change over time. Technically, this data is not part of CFS (though WFP breakfast programmes are intended to contribute to good health which is included in Dimension 3) but teachers at Sala Phum regarded it as such.

At school level, perhaps the most obvious forms of deployment are the tangible physical manifestations of CFS, including pictures on classroom walls, clay figurines and cans filled with sticks and stones, a clean yard, and statistical charts on office walls. Closer scrutiny reveals a preoccupation with appearance and form, rather than on application and function. For example, in a typical classroom, the walls are plastered with bright pictures and posters – these are not always related to education, are not necessarily age appropriate, rarely changed once posted, and seldom do teachers reference wall decorations during lessons. Researchers saw just one instance of a teacher actually using pre-collected sticks and stones during class, and these were employed for an intentional CFS lesson.

Many primary schools, like Sala Phum, have received playground equipment from UNICEF as part of UNICEF’s CFS campaign. However, at the majority of schools visited,
most of the equipment was broken and rusted. A long-term expatriate advisor to the World Bank relayed the following related anecdote from the previous year:

A school in Prey Veng that flooded frequently during rainy season asked UNICEF if they could spend some of their CFS allocation on a boat. They were told no, they had to buy teaching and learning equipment and supplies like textbooks and paper (which reportedly, they did not have). The school said yes, yes. When I returned, I found they had used the funds to purchase metal playground equipment. Their rationale was: we are CFS, CFS children are happy, children are happy when they play, now they have something to play with, therefore we are Child Friendly. The kids were not using the equipment though, because the staff didn’t know how to put it together. (I-A10)

School yards and playgrounds are usually clean, but behind many school buildings, trash lies in rotting mounds. School office the walls are covered with information: it is usually outdated, charts and maps reportedly developed in one or another training event but not referenced thereafter. Administrators do not know how the information might be applied comparatively over time. All offices visited displayed a map of their school catchment area: but none were current. Organisational charts for various committees also fill the walls of the Sala Phum office: School Committee, Parents Committee, Girl Committee. But these too represent theory rather than reality as many parents and children had never heard of the committees, some children who self-identified as committee members did not know the purpose of the committee and had never met with others on the committee, and in many cases the adults designated to be in charge do not know what their responsibility is.

**Incorporation:** The term “incorporate” is defined here as “to work into something already existent so as to form an indistinguishable whole.” In this sense, it means that general ideas, or forms or structures, are added to existing practices without causing much change in overall classroom or school practice. “Conflation” in general is one example of incorporation – that is, practitioners (erroneously) equating different activities with the CFS approach. Three
specific examples of this at the local level are how practitioners enact the CFS concepts of 1) student participation and group work, 2) slow learners, and 3) health and safety. In all three cases, practitioners acknowledge the element but fail to implement as intended, not least because of the cognitive dissonance created by conflicting values.

CFS as practiced in Cambodia may in fact be nearly unrecognisable to external observers as such. As an example, group work was observed by the research team in every school and every class visited. However, for group work, though students get together in small teams and produce outcomes, genuinely collective activity is very limited. Overall, groups are not facilitated by teachers or group members, students do not share their own ideas with each other or dialogue in the groups, but rather find the answers in the textbooks and copy them verbatim. Often a single student completes the work for the whole group.

As for addressing slow learners, all teachers knew CFS has an emphasis on this and all said they give special attention to this group. In many cases, teachers indicated that half their students belong in this category. However, teachers are unable to distinguish between different reasons why student/s might be “slow” (one could envision reasons being related to emotional, psychological, physiological, attitudinal, or physical conditions). Teachers were not once observed to work with slow learner individuals, but rather worked with the whole group of slow learners simultaneously, roughly once a week. And, these special lessons consisted of repeating previous lessons in much the same way as originally taught.

At the school level, health and safety/security issues (CFS Dimension 3) are seen in simplistic terms as school breakfast, toilets, clean water source, and traffic safety. However, many toilet blocks are built but never used, or access to them is treacherously poised along the edge of a large pond, or the doors remain locked so the cubicles are not dirtied. Neither broken
playground equipment nor broken desks and blackboards heaped at the back of a classroom are regarded as dangerous or a threat to child wellbeing – perhaps this is because life in rural Cambodia is generally a hazardous affair. Though there was very little motorised traffic (with the exception of motorcycles) around the school and between catchment villages, vehicle accidents were identified as posing a significant risk to children. Part of the reason for this focus on vehicular traffic could be that it is included as an independent lesson and official posters of traffic signs were scattered through the catchment villages.

**Adaptation**: Adaptation is defined for purpose of this research as intentional change by practitioners of the foreign concept to suit their (local) situation. I employ the term in a similar way to Allden’s “internalisation” and “localisation” (2009, p. 25 borrowing from Acharya, 2004) which she defines as “to actively construct foreign ideas into something local, making the international norm fit into the local hierarchy of norms” (p. 25). In other words, the local reality is the referent to which something foreign is grafted. Conceptual variants such as Phillips and Ochs’ (2003, p. 452) “indigenisation,” or the terms contextualisation, and hybridisation are understood to be “strong” and vigorous versions of adaptation, closer to integration or synthesis and thus a different category. Adaptation may be negatively or positively motivated; that is, shaped by constraints or opportunities – for instance, budgetary limitations might well influence adaptation of a given policy or strategy.

Adaptation is happening with four major elements of CFS. For instance, the emphasis on “happy children” is quite a digression from the actual CFS aim as cited herewith:

> making child-centred principles [central]….  In other words classroom process should not be one in which children are passive recipients of knowledge dispensed by a sole authority, the teacher. Rather it should be an interactive process in which children are active participants in observing, exploring, listening, reason, questioning, and ‘coming to know.’ (UNICEF, 2009c, Ch. 2, p. 13)
Nonetheless it represents a big shift in making the educational system more hospitable for Cambodian children and thus is still a major point of ambivalence for teachers. It is possible to observe that the traditionally rigid enactment of class, and the harsh hierarchical structure of the school, is somewhat softened by this foreign ideal, meaningful because it is distinctly Cambodian.

A second example of adaptation is the grassroots enactment of community participation as exemplified by School Support Committees. The SSC name, as well as official composition, and responsibilities are a recent prescription – but the committees themselves have a history of operation that far pre-dates even the French colonial period (Pellini, 2007). The work and priorities of the committees in actuality, then, is more Cambodian than foreign. This group sees its task as raising funds and good will for the school. At the research site, the SSC were not involved in school management, budgeting, or decision-making; in some cases, SSC members did not have any children of their own enrolled at the school they represented.

A third example relates to local perceptions and practice of so-called student centred learning. Frequently it was conflated with group work. It was also defined in terms of students doing more work than teachers: thus teachers had students reading aloud from the text, responding to the teacher’s questions read out from the teacher guidebook, or doing group work for the majority of each class period. In other words, students are perhaps more vocal than in previous eras, but little energy is expended on actually grappling with information and ideas. The internationally dominant pedagogical model of student-centred learning has been on the periphery of Cambodian teaching for more than a decade. This research suggests that local adaptation had not occurred because “proper techniques” have not been taught/learned
but because it runs counter to locally defined concepts of what it means to be a good teacher and a good student.

A final example of adaptation is the work of the DTMT. This self-appointed team uses two complicated checklist/s to grade teacher performance and school performance. During a visit they only observe in classrooms and do not speak with teachers. The DTMT system follows a strict chain-of-command: the monitors leave their report with the School Director who is then charged with sharing the results with individual teachers. The focus of the guidelines is heavily weighted toward physical appearance and existence of materials.

DTMT’s three official objectives as per MoEYS guidelines are as follows:

Bolstering the effectiveness of provincial/municipal and district/khan CFS development teams in developing CFS through networks; accelerating CFS development as planned by providing each sub-group with training and monitoring; and strengthening provincial/municipal educational structure ownership of and responsibilities for self-improvement and self-development. (MoEYS, 2008c, p. 1).

Among other things, it is difficult to see how absence of interaction with the grading team could lead to increased ownership for improvement. Ostensibly the DTMT has been set up for the purpose of promoting international norms of decentralisation, accountability, and transparency. It appears to have been well grafted into an already top-down system, and serves an obvious regulatory function, though not so much for training and support.

**Contestation:** Contestation is used here for instances of when education stakeholders acknowledge and pay lip-service to an idea, but do not actually engage because they are fundamentally opposed to the idea. By this definition, there appears to be little overt contestation at the central level – officials are enthusiastic about CFS, even to the point of expansion to lower secondary (I-A9). However, the strongly top-down way in which CFS is being imposed by the MoEYS, as well as the rigid and excessively detailed monitoring frame it
has instituted, suggests that the fundamental principle/s of stakeholder participation and local adaptation are ill-fitting garb. Other instances of implicit contestation from central level authorities are found in textbooks. For example, textbook content contests the notion of inclusiveness by focusing on Buddhism as the only legitimate religion and in its caricature of indigenous ethnic minorities. The way that textbooks, and hiring practices within MoEYS, contradict the concept of gender equality is well detailed elsewhere in this research. Textbooks also [implicitly] contest the Western standard/s of democracy and political transparency promoted by CFS. An example of this is a textbook message of environmental preservation and simultaneously blaming of powerless people (such as indigenous people or ignorant farmers) for environmental degradation when in fact the RGC is more destructive through granting of land concessions to multi-national corporations and turning a [well paid] ‘blind eye’ to illegal logging by local companies.

At grassroots level, school response to the issues of corporal punishment, interactive pedagogy, and inclusiveness exemplify contestation of global educational discourse. Teachers see child rights as disempowering for adults, and as running contrary to a teacher’s role of imparting knowledge and developing moral character. Teachers strongly believe that corporal punishment is an effective way to manage their classrooms and promote learning; in lieu of corporal punishment, outlawed several years ago, they do not know how to manage unruly students well, nor how to “make students learn.” Thus, the majority of teachers continue to use soft versions of corporal punishment, including shaming and blaming of students.

As for inclusiveness, all children to school, many teachers expressed disagreement with this concept because in their opinion it lowers educational quality. So, villages and schools vigorously undertake enrolment campaigns (for which teachers are paid a small stipend) but
because of the prevalence of simplistic views of disability and difference, in fact they largely ignore both by refusing to acknowledge their existence. Further, the majority of school buildings visited during this research had just a token concrete wheelchair ramp to the main classroom blocks as their concession to disability (though getting to the school yard over dirt roads would be quite a feat in a wheelchair). No other arrangements were made to accommodate physically disabled children because, as commonly stated, “We don’t have those here.”

And, as a final example of contestation of CFS as a concept, there are a large number of pedagogical and management techniques included in the CFS Effective Teaching and Learning guide books which are being ignored. Again, teachers are aware of these games, tools, and techniques, they have been taught/trained in them, and occasionally do dust them off when required by supervisory visits, but do not actively incorporate them in classroom instruction. For example, Blooms’ taxonomy is very seldom referenced or employed, not necessarily because it is not understood, but because it represents a threat to teachers as sole purveyors of knowledge. Other teaching methods purposefully ignored by teachers at the research site include: classroom layout plans, interaction with text to aid understanding, incorporating “real time text” and other locally relevant information, student portfolios, varying assessment methods, writing tasks.

**Resistance**: In this context, resistance is defined as refusal to accept or implement global norms. Resistance may be explicit or tacit; and it may be intentional or reflexive (a subconscious response). At first glance, there appears to be minimal overt resistance by any stakeholder/s to Child Friendly Schools per se. However that it is happening is illustrated in Chapter Two which highlights national level resistance to international educational orthodoxies.
in the form of outright rejection of particular reading methods, intentional ignorance of the concept of education for sustainable development, and very limited efforts to address socio-cultural barriers to gender equality. In textbook content, for instance, the MoEYS appears to be intentional about ensuring that it does not upset the gender status quo, while simultaneously including technical information about Western human rights-based perspective of equality of individuals and ensuring equal numbers of males/females are depicted in illustrations.

A final example of a strong version of explicit resistance to global educational norms is the intentional rejection of the ideal of democratisation of education. Clearly the MoEYS desires to retain the rigid hierarchy it has erected, demonstrated by the limited opportunity for each level of the system to provide feedback or input to the level above it (ie. teachers to administrators, provincial authorities to central MoEYS authorities, etc.). Thus, while there is documented reference to the value of greater autonomy at ground level, and responsiveness to specific local environments, in fact, school and classroom practice is largely dictated by central-level authorities. This is not unique to the education sector – as described elsewhere, it is a manifestation of the Khmer social structure, a neo-patrimonial system.

At grassroots level, the issue of violence, officially part of Dimension 3 and the subject of one whole guidebook, did not surface in discussion with teachers, administrators, or caregivers. When probing questions were asked about physical and psychological bullying, researchers were invariably told it “it does happen at this school.” While caregivers and teachers in focus groups expressed a generalised concern with safety for girls from physical harm or sexual molestation while enroute to school (and both male and female students did too) this issue was not regarded as an actual problem or risk by stakeholders associated with
any of the schools visited during the research period. This response can be interpreted as an example of resistance to international priorities and mandates.

**Summary.** In summary, partially because of the local emphasis on form rather than function, it is difficult to see where and how contestation and resistance to global discourse occurs. At grassroots level, teachers commonly give four reasons for why implementing (“doing”) CFS is not possible: no time, no money, no materials, and (less often) a teacher’s own insufficient understanding or capacity. These may be legitimate constraints to full-fledged implementation, but they do not tell the full story. Rather, there is unacknowledged underlying tension and discomfort as deeply held values and socio-cultural predispositions of teachers and education professionals come into conflict with Western ideas of individual independence, child rights, inquiry-based learning, and democratic impulses. This is a key conclusion in regard to implications for foreign assistance to the Cambodian education sector because both donors and RGC still rely heavily on both the “poverty discourse” and the “low capacity discourse.” That is, key barriers to implementation are cited by stakeholders at all levels as insufficient material resources and limited ability of teachers to understand and implement. Unless additional training includes attention to underlying values and dialogue about educational philosophy, it is unlikely to make a difference at the point of implementation.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has provided a thick description of teacher perceptions and classroom enactment of CFS in one rural school community. Based on analysis of how CFS was perceived and enacted at village level, a 5-point explanatory frame was constructed to describe the local response to globalised educational discourse in the form of CFS. The five major types of response from key education sector stakeholders in Cambodia were identified as:
deployment, incorporation, adaptation, contestation, and resistance. Responses differ depending on the stakeholder’s level: for instance, central MoEYS authorities and rural school teachers may have a different way of responding to particular policies or practices. As covered in Chapter Two, rejection (a strong form of resistance) of international norms and ideals is not so apparent at local level, but it does occur at national level through intentional ignorance, practiced ambivalence, and outright refusal.

Clearly, CFS has been institutionalised at policy level but not internalised at the level of practice (N.B. Chapter Nine contains extensive discussion of the conditions necessary for internalisation of foreign norms). Teachers are familiar with terminology and practice some forms of CFS, but do not exhibit deep understanding of the philosophy underlying CFS or the purpose behind many prescribed actions they do take. For example, CFS is regarded as an activity rather than an approach to education; it is commonly conflated with group work, student-centred learning, and the use of materials. Further, no instances of individuated instruction occurred during the entire five months of classroom observation, whole-class teaching dominated, as did emphasis on repetition of facts with virtually no attention to higher level skills of understanding and critical thinking. There were some but very few cases of teachers making reference to their own locality during instructional time. Though virtually all classroom walls in every school observed were heavily plastered with posters and pictures, very few teachers ever actually appealed to items on the walls during class time, and fewer still could explain the rationale behind such decorations.

Special attention was given in this chapter to the discussion of discipline and corporal punishment because it provides such a clear example of the cognitive dissonance Cambodians experience as they attempt to incorporate international norms that are based on different values.
and a dissimilar worldview. Robbed by policy of their most effective tool (corporal
punishment), teachers at Sala Phum expressed feelings of frustration (and disempowerment) at
not being able to manage and motivate their students in a way they believed would result in
better learning outcomes.

Findings also indicated that parents and caregivers have (unrealistic) high expectations
for school as a site for child character development, as well as a propensity for equating formal
education with lucrative employment. Combined with ineffectual classroom practice, these
expectations may well result in disillusionment with public versions of formal education as a
means for social advancement and may well affect national-level enrolment, as well as
achievement, in future.
CHAPTER EIGHT: GENDERED IDENTITIES AND RELATIONS IN SCHOOL

Increasingly, Cambodian women are assuming more prominent roles in the public sphere, including the formal political realm and social and economic arenas. More women than ever before in the nation’s history are in the civil service, hold senior positions in government, and are attending school including higher education institutions. However, the traditional view of women as inferior persists, and in fact remains a strong though subtle subtext in many spheres. What is more, evidence suggests that national political interests are being intentionally bolstered by public appeal by authority figures to historic (and arguably mythical) conservative social mores for women (Edwards, 2008). This reversion constrains opportunities for women and girls to benefit from the globalised discourse about gender equity which increasingly permeates the formal policy realm and public rhetoric, but which paradoxically has barely altered gendered identities and relationships in Cambodia. And here, it must be acknowledged that while the negative implications of gender-based discrimination for individuals, as well as for national development, may seem painfully obvious, discussion about gender in connection with any other sector (including education) are likely to be particularly problematic for the Khmer given their history and professed lack of positive ethnic and national identity.

This chapter begins by highlighting the gap between local reality experienced by many Cambodian women, and the global-cum-national policy frame which grants equality and protects women from discrimination of many kinds. It suggests that local understanding/s of gender and sex, and thus gender equality, are influenced by Khmer language constraints and poor, often literal translation. Lack of local appreciation for the complexities of the concept of gender is also identified as a barrier to positively changing gendered relations. Then the
chapter paints a detailed picture of the national policy(ies) framework relating to women, education, and gender to demonstrate that international gender norms have indeed been institutionalised, though they are far from being internalised. After that, this chapter provides a thick description of grassroots perspectives on gender, as expressed by teachers, students. That section includes a comprehensive gender analysis of Grades 4-6 textbooks, both illustrations and text.

**Local reality vs. global discourse**

Academic and NGO literature about Cambodia does share consensus that despite significant official rhetoric to the contrary, women remain subordinate to men in all spheres of life in Cambodia: “Men have higher status than women, both in their families and in Cambodian society. Men are the heads of their families. They are viewed as having the final word in their households, and other family members are expected to show them deference, respect, and obedience” (Walsh, 2007, p. 9). This perspective is one reason why the overall mean level of education remains low for women. Forty percent of women age 25-44 are illiterate (vs. 22 percent of men). Although improving in younger age groups, 23 percent of young women age 15-24 are illiterate (vs. 16 percent of young men) (UNICEF, 2009b, p. 41). An additional 35 percent of women age 25-44 and 33 percent of women age 15-24 have less than a primary school education (p. 41).

Clearly then, not only do prevailing attitudes toward women result in inequalities such as poor literacy levels and lower wages for comparable work, but it has more insidious results such as preventing women from accessing educational and economic opportunities that would allow them to improve their standard of living and find safe, meaningful employment; hindering female participation in all levels of government, from village to national level; and
fostering rampant violence against women (including rape, human trafficking, sexual exploitation) for which there is little recourse or social support.

In summary, globalised discourse about primary education, which includes human rights, appears to be having just an incremental effect on promoting transformation/s in gender/ed identities and relations in Cambodia. National-level documents include overt attention to gender and “gender mainstreaming”; and frequently the need to promote (and protect) women and women’s rights arises in official policy and planning documents produced by central government authorities. However, references tend to be vague, and strategies to affect “gender equity” most frequently address “hardware issues” (build a dormitory) or prescribe “awareness raising” or “training” as the means for achieving it. While there is a relatively high degree of awareness among MOEYS-related respondents about “correct” answers relating to gender in education, deep change and sustained application of the principles of “equality” and of “equity” have not occurred.

“Gender is a borrowed word”

There is no definitive way to translate the English term “gender” into the Khmer language. When asked this question, one Under-Secretary of State in the MoEYS exclaimed: “Gender is a borrowed word. We don’t have it in Khmer. So, if you just say ‘gender’ everyone understands” (I-P39). Indeed, Khmer speakers simply transliterate the English word gender to “jendah” in written documents as well as verbally, because there is no equivalent Khmer word or concept. Thus, contrary to the MoEYS official’s suggestion, in fact, this linguistic deficit probably signals a lack of appreciation for the complexities of the concept by those using the term. The head of the Gender Working Group in MoEYS emphasised that for the Ministry of Education “Gender is a balance of numbers, male and female” (I-P23). A high-
ranking official in the Teacher Training department said, “We did not have gender in the past, but now girls can go to school” (I-A9). This is the same general understanding that teachers and administrators at the rural research site had as well. Indeed, “equality” expressed in numbers is the most common way that most Cambodians who are familiar with the term define, describe, and use jendah.

The official Khmer version of the national CFS policy statement for Dimension Four does little to advance understanding about gender. It explains the purpose of this dimension as “Make aware and promote to understand about problem of sex (pate) [as in male/female] in school, in family, in community.” The policy’s original language was English, and as might be expected, the English reads much more easily and accurately than the Khmer translation: “Dimension 4: Gender Responsiveness” aims “to promote awareness in schools, families and communities of their roles and responsibilities for providing equal and equitable education and educational opportunity for both girls and boys so that they can participate equally in all activities in school, family and society” (MoEYS, 2007). It can be concluded that in the minds of most Cambodian formal school educators, indeed, education sector participants, gender is (mis)understood simply as “equal numbers of girls and boys” with an emphasis on narrowing the gap for girls.

Neither of the two major reference dictionaries available in Cambodia (the Headly Dictionary and the Chuan Nat Dictionary) contain the word gender. The Ministry of Women’s Affairs defines gender (in Khmer) as “referring to the roles/responsibilities of men and women, attitudes, values that society has defined and believed that are suitable for both sexes.” Another definition ascribed to the Leak Srey document in a Cambodia Women’s Centre document (CWC, 2011) takes an equality perspective: “Gender is referring to the equality of
men and women’s responsibilities in developing family and society because in this modern time [due to] the expansion of democracy, which can’t be stopped.”

Gender and Development-Cambodia (GAD-C), one of the nation’s foremost NGOs specialising in gender-related programming, uses the following definition:

Gender refers to the differences between men and women in the society. The differences are known by men and women themselves and they change from time to time. Gender has changed largely between men and women according to culture in the society and from one culture to others. (GAD-C, 2001, np)

The most thorough and comprehensive, and accurate definition of gender was produced in a MoWA document in English and it is not available in Khmer, so it is doubtful that many staff within that Ministry are familiar with this particular definition:

Gender refers to roles, attitudes and values assigned by culture and society to women and men. These roles, attitudes and values define the behaviours of women and men and the relationship between them. They are created and maintained by social institutions such as families, governments, communities, schools, churches and media. Because of gender, certain roles, traits and characteristics are assigned or ascribed distinctly and strictly to women or to men. (MoWA, Gender Terminology, 2006)

In summary, differences manifest in official organisational definitions of gender show a lack of consistency in local understanding of the term, hint that gendered social relations are not immutable, but still leave room for continuation of the limited concept of it as just that: fixed, unchanging, the way that it should be.

**Policy Framework: Women, Education, and Gender**

Significant attention to gender is apparent in numerous policy and legal documents that provide the framework within which education occurs in Cambodia. This section provides details of that rhetorical framework, first highlighting relevant points within the country’s constitution and then detailing three key national economic and social development policy documents which provide the context for ensuing exploration of the labyrinth of education
policy, strategy, and planning documents that constitute the platform from which education is enacted. Those policy documents are the Rectangular Strategy (2008), National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) (2010a), and Neary Rattanak III (2009). Next, this section describes the national policies relating directly to education before turning to look at the actual practice of getting girls into school and keeping them there. It ends with a discussion of how gender is portrayed in the MoEYS official national textbooks.

**Legal framework**

Under the Cambodian Constitution (2003), all Cambodian citizens (regardless of sex) have the right to nine years of free education in public schools, as detailed in Chapter VI Education, Culture, Social Affairs and shown in Table 31 below.

| Article 65 - | The State shall protect and upgrade citizens' rights to quality education at all levels and shall take necessary steps for equality education to reach all citizens. The State shall respect physical education and sports for the welfare of all Khmer citizens. |
| Article 66 | The State shall establish a comprehensive and standardised educational system throughout the country that shall guarantee the principles of educational freedom and equality to ensure that all citizens have equal opportunity to earn a living. |
| Article 67 | The State shall adopt an educational program according to the principle of modern pedagogy including technology and foreign languages. The State shall control public and private schools and classrooms at all levels. |
| Article 68 | The State shall provide free primary and secondary education to all citizens in public schools. Citizens shall receive education for at least 9 years. The State shall disseminate and develop the Pali schools and the Buddhist Institute. |
| Article 48 (Ch. III The Rights and Obligations of Khmer citizens) | Specifically addresses children’s right to education, again, not in a sex- or gender-specific way, but “generically”: The State shall protect the rights of the children as stipulated in the Convention on Children, in particular, the right to life, education, protection during wartime, and from economic or sexual exploitation. The State shall protect children from acts that are injurious to their educational opportunities, health, and welfare. |
The Cambodian Constitution contains multiple other Articles specifically relevant to (for/about) women, for instance: Art. 31 (human rights); 34 (right to vote); 36 (employment and equal wages); 38 (physical abuse); 44 (property ownership); 45 (discrimination against women, labour exploitation, marriage). Article 46 exclusively addresses women, starting with the prohibition that “the commerce of human beings, exploitation by prostitution and obscenity which affect the reputation of women shall be prohibited” (italics mine). As implied by Article 46, paradoxically, parts of the Constitution assume and promote a traditional view of women which is not egalitarian. Another example is Article 36, which specifies “The work by housewives in the home shall have the same value as what they can receive when working outside the home” (italics mine). A plethora of other legal documents also [theoretically] protect and promote the rights of girls and women in Cambodia, and several also contain specific mention of education for females both as an end in itself (a “right”), as well as a means to other ends (better quality of life, participation in government, etc.).

**Economic and social development policy**

The social and economic development sectors in Cambodia are awash with official documents, plans, strategies – many of them prepared in the English language by foreign consultants (not Cambodian). This complex web of strategies, policies, and plans is often self-referential as well as self-congratulatory, and frequently obfuscates the distinction between goals and achievements. For example, the current NDSP (2010a) states that “implementation of Child Friendly Schools [has] contributed to improving education quality and efficiency” (p.

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62). However, the document provides no evidence for “improvement” against objectively verifiable indicators, as if stating a policy or aim is commensurate with achievement of that policy/aim.

Despite much enlightened rhetoric about “educational quality”, in fact, a preponderance of aims and indicators, as well as stated “challenges to be addressed” in official government documents relating to education remain distinctly concrete and quantitative: for instance – numbers of schools, numbers of teaching staff, educational facility construction, number of scholarships for poor students. “Quality and efficiency” indicators tend to be stated in terms of promotion rates, policy, guideline, or document production, and achievement against standardised tests.

**Rectangular Strategy, Phase II:** The *National EFA Mid-decade Assessment Report 2005* (UNICEF, 2007) clearly describes the government’s view of the role of education in national development: that the education sector “has a vital role in national unity and in strengthening national identity as a framework for socio-economic development” (p. 1).

Cambodia’s national 5-year rolling development plan, the NDSP is based on the Rectangular Strategy Framework which represents “the socio-economic policy agenda” of the ruling Cambodian People’s Party (CPP). The Rectangular Strategy is a structure of four interlocking rectangles around a “core” of “good governance”. Education and gender are independently addressed, but both included in the fourth strategic "growth rectangle" of “Capacity Building and Human Resource Development,” a rectangle comprised of the following four priorities: (1) strengthening the quality of education; (2) enhancing health services; (3) implementation of gender policy; and (4) implementation of national population policy.
Description of the education quadrant consists of five paragraphs. First, the RGC describes its “remarkable progress” in purely quantitative terms (enrolment rates, facilities construction, number of teachers deployed, budget allocation). Second, the document (re)states the right of citizens to education, and the objective of Cambodia’s public education system:

…ensuring that all Cambodian children and youth should have equal opportunity for access to basic education, both formal and informal, without discrimination on grounds of race, skin colour, gender, languages, religion, political affiliations of parents, place of birth and social status. Equally, the implementation of the Strategic Plan is linked to imparting a culture of peace, respect for human rights and dignity, respect for the principles of freedom, democracy and justice, and instilling a culture against violence, drug use, child and women trafficking and social discrimination.

The third paragraph describes how “education quality” will be addressed, that is, through: ensuring access (enrolment efforts; dorms for girls; scholarships for poor; facility construction); improving instructional quality (providing teacher incentives, upgrading teaching methodology, increasing teacher qualifications; curriculum improvement, better teaching materials). Clearly, “hardware” (construction of school buildings and facilities; financing) remains in the RGC’s perspective, one of its most important mechanisms for “improving educational quality”. Fourth, the RSII states ways in which the government will link formal and non-formal education to the labour market (through private-public partnerships, etc.). There is a strong emphasis on basic “skills training” and on “vocational training”, though “technician and engineer training” (?) are mentioned. And finally, the section specific to education emphasises the need for literacy and vocational training and concludes with a bland statement about “higher quality” which is implicitly suggests that quality can be achieved through the application of more dollars:
Article 97. The Royal Government will continue to expand informal (sic) education through literacy and vocational programs, establishment of community learning centres and implementation of equity programs. The government will increase budget allocation for education and mobilise more financing to support education to ensure higher and effective quality of education.

National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP update 2009-2013). This plan bills itself as “the roadmap for the implementation of the Rectangular Strategy and in this role, this Plan becomes the second [most] important document of the Royal Government of Cambodia” (2010, p. ii) after the Rectangular Strategy. The overall aim of this plan is “regional and global economic integration” (p. i), political stability, and the creation of “a favourable environment to attract both domestic and foreign investments, with the aim of ensuring high rates of economic growth and poverty reduction” (p. i). “Modernisation” and “increasing public sector efficiency” are additional aims clearly set out in this document.

According to the NSDP, the purpose of providing equitable access to education for all Cambodian children is an unabashedly human capital rationale – so that they will “become good students, good children, and good citizens who will be able to productively contribute to socio-economic development of Cambodia in the future.” (p. 61). This document then refers to the Education Strategic Plan (ESP 2006-2010, ESP 2009-2013) for its discussion of aims, achievements, and challenges; the plans and priorities echo the Rectangular Strategy with a focus on expansion of physical facilities, provision of scholarships, and improving “quality and effectiveness” primarily through increased administration, inspection, and monitoring (p. 168-172). A stronger theme in this document is that of “decentralisation” (mostly through development and promulgation of policies, decrees, circulars, and guidelines) (p. 170-171). Traditional core indicators continue to be: net enrolment (by sex, by location) and completion rate for primary and lower secondary school, and literacy rate (by age, by sex).” Interestingly,
none of the indicators actually address the ostensible RGC priorities of “effectiveness” or “quality.”

As for addressing gender and education, from the education angle, this is still stated in terms of increasing “access” for girls, and then, curiously specific, by the establishment of “female student councils in schools to deal with difficulties and to encourage female students” (p. 171). For the gender angle on education, the NSDP refers to MoWA’s Neary Rattanak III’s (2009a) objective of “Promotion of women and girls education and attitude and behaviour change.” Specific actions to be taken are, again, stated in terms of increasing access for females to formal and non-formal public education (mostly through awareness raising).

Secondly, the MoWA in cooperation with relevant stakeholders will:

Foster harmony in the family and society and promote the status of women by implementing the National Programme on Social Morality, the Value of Women and Family; increasing public awareness of, and taking action to prevent indecent acts and the spread of pornographic material (2009a, p. 179).

It is worth noting that virtually none of the RGC’s stated action points in any policy or strategy documents around gender refer to the need for males to change or alter their behaviour – rather, they (inadvertently?) add another burden to women, requiring greater effort on women’s part to participate. An excellent example of this public tendency to (over)burden women is a statement made by then Queen Norodom Moninath Sihanouk in her Royal Message on the 93rd anniversary of International Women’s Day (8 March, 2003): “I urge all women in Cambodia to work hard to build your capacity and be prepared to take an even greater role in national development. Then women will become valuable human resources, who are indisputably needed in the development of all sectors” (cited in Kasumi, 2006, p. 7).

**Neary Rattanak III (2009):** Literally translated as “women are precious jewels,” Neary Rattanak, the government’s national strategic plan for promoting gender equity and women’s
empowerment is a rolling 5-year plan produced by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs which has been designated as the principle national mechanism for coordinating gender policy development and monitoring and reporting on progress. This plan is so named in response to the oft-cited proverb pro doich mi’eh, srey doich somley (lit. “men are gold, women are cloth,” which Dirks (2008, p. 186) explains is a reference to the double-standard Cambodians have for male and female sexual and behavioural mores. It literally means “when gold falls in the mud it can be cleaned and will be shiny again, whereas a piece of cloth will remain stained forever.”). The Neary Rattanak document then, ostensibly is intended to affirm the value of women vis-à-vis men. In doing so, however, it does not challenge the status quo of using males as a primary referent. Nor does the Neary Rattanak challenge males to change, or citizens to change their view of appropriate male behaviour.

Neary Rattanak III outlines key challenges for women in Cambodia as women’s economic empowerment, gender and education, gender and health, violence against women, women in public decision-making and politics, and gender mainstreaming. Accordingly, “Strategic area 2: Education of Women and Girls, Attitudes and Behaviour change” is one of MoWA’s five priorities. The objective of this priority “is to increase participation of girls in formal education at all levels, promotion of literacy and skills development programs for women, and the promotion of social morality and family values.” There is some irony in pushing for promotion of “social morality and family values” since in the current Cambodian context these are expressly the values to which scholars and NGO development workers attribute the widespread discrimination against women, gender-based violence, and inequitable political representation.
The five targets for achieving “Education of women and girls” continue the RGC’s trend of being so non-specific as to be virtually meaningless, putting unwarranted confidence in “awareness raising” and placing the major locus of responsibility for improvement on girls/females themselves:

1) Responsible parenting and public awareness promoted of the importance of education, especially for girls.
2) Community pre-schools and parenting education program expanded.
3) Culture of non-violence and reduction of discrimination against women promoted in all sections of the community.
4) Informal [sic] education and life skills development for women and girls who dropped out of school.
5) Attention paid to factors enabling and supporting the participation and retention of girls in the formal education system (by providing scholarships, transport, and accommodation for girls).

**Educational policy and gender**

Cambodians, and particularly Cambodian females, are very well served by official educational policy rhetoric. Quality basic education is guaranteed through a concentric series of policy documents, originating in the Constitution and propelled by the Rectangular Strategy, the lofty goals of the National Education Law and dynamic aims of a 5-year rolling Education Strategic Plan (ESP) are buoyed up by international interest in and support of the country’s Education for All strategy, and ostensible commitment to the achievement of MDG goals.

**National Education Law:** By this law, “All citizens have the right to receive without payment at least nine years of quality education in the public school” (Article 31). This document does not include specific reference to either sex. It does contain a single reference to gender (Article 34: “Rights and duties of learners” includes the clause “obey the internal regulations of the institution, respect gender equity, and exercise one’s own rights, while also respecting other people’s rights” (italics mine). Through the global EFA campaign, Cambodia has publicly committed to providing basic education (grades 1-9) for all its citizens by 2015.
Ratification of the Convention to End all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and Cambodia’s own MDG 2 are further indication of the country’s ostensible commitment to ensure that all girls receive basic education.

**Education Strategic Plan (ESP 2009-2013):** The vision and mission of MoEYS is stated as: “to establish and develop human resources of the very highest quality and ethics in order to develop a knowledge-based society within Cambodia” (2010, p. 1). Achieving this vision will require responding to “the socio-economic and cultural development needs of its people and the reality of regionalisation and globalisation” (p. 1). MoEYS’s long-term objective is to “achieve the holistic development of Cambodia’s young people for all sectors” and “to engender a sense of national and civic pride, high moral and ethical standards and a strong belief in young people’s responsibility for the country and its citizens” (p. 2).

This plan prioritises three main strategies to realise MoEYS’s vision and objectives as follows (p. 15-16):

1. Ensuring equitable access to education services.
2. Improving quality and efficiency of education services.
3. Institutional and capacity development for educational staff for decentralisation.

Indicators selected to measure achievement reveals a strong quantitative, “efficiency” orientation: enrolment, NAR, NER, GER, numbers of students in higher education, literacy rates, pupil-teacher ratio, repetition and drop-out rates, completion rates, textbook-pupil ratio, standardised test results, number of audits, education share of total RGC recurrent budget, days of technical assistance, ratio of female education staff (p. 87-88).

In the national Education Strategic Plan, as in other education policies, gender is defined as “equal numbers of boys and girls” and therefore must sometimes take the form of emphasis on girls. And, in ESP as in other related documents, the presence/implementation of
Child Friendly Schools is regarded as part of the means to the end of the “quality and efficiency” goal.

Cambodia’s EFA National Plan (2003-2015) has six main goals, three of which specify attention to “females” (p. 3): Basic formal education (“Ensuring that by 2015, all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances, and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality”); adult literacy and non-formal education (“Achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults”); and gender equity (“Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equity by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality”).

Millennium Development Goals (MDG): For Cambodia, two of the nine MDG are expressed explicitly in terms of education for females (RGC/MoP, 2011). Cambodia’s two country-specific targets within MDG 2 (“Achieve universal primary education”) are stated as “Ensure all children complete primary schooling by 2015, and if possible expand to nine-year basic schooling” (p. 16) and “Eliminate gender disparity in nine-year basic education by 2010” (p. 18). Further, MDG 3 (“Promote gender equality and empower women”) contains four Cambodia-specific targets:

1. Reduce significantly gender disparities in upper secondary and tertiary education. (p. 19)
2. Eliminate wage disparities in wage employment in all economic sectors. (p. 20)
3. Eliminate gender disparity in public institutions. (p. 20)
4. Reduce significantly all forms of violence against women and children. (p. 20)

For overall achievement, primary and lower secondary school NER, while improving, are still strongly characterised by regional disparity. Primary level NER is 92.2 percent, 95.3
percent, and 90.3 percent for urban, rural, and remote locations respectively. Lower secondary NER is 48.3 percent, 28.8 percent, and 11.3 percent for those same locations (p. 16-17). The big difference is caused by low flow-through at primary level (that is, a large number of students repeat multiple grades/times) and high drop-out rates in lower secondary (p. 17).

Gender disparities in primary and lower secondary education have, according to the RGC, been eliminated and in the case of LSS, they have been reversed (p. 17); and with the exception of a single province, there is no significant difference in gender parity between locations in Cambodia (p. 18). This is attributed largely to the placement of female teachers who now comprise 46 percent of all primary school teachers. The story is vastly different for upper secondary and tertiary education. For upper secondary school (grades 10-12), the ratio of girls to boys is 72.9/100 and for tertiary education that ratio diminishes to 57.5/100 (p. 19).

**Child Friendly Schools Policy:** Cambodia’s CFS Policy (2006, currently being updated by a Canadian Consultant) states that this policy aims to facilitate achievement of various other national objectives, specifically the national education goals, MDG, national EFA plan, and ESP/ESSP annual rolling plan. “Girls” are mentioned specifically in two of the six CFS dimensions. In Dimension 1 (Schools are inclusive) “girls” are mentioned as one of eight types of “children in difficult circumstances” who must be supported to “access school with equity”. Dimension 4 (Gender responsiveness) speaks of the need to promote “equitable education and educational opportunity for both girls and boys....” Specific, time-bound aims for all six dimensions are detailed in a (rolling) Master Plan document, but are stated mostly in terms of documentation development, dissemination, capacity building for administrators and teachers, and physical infrastructure. Theoretically, local schools have a significant amount of latitude and responsibility for implementing CFS at that level.
**MoEYS Gender Mainstreaming Action Plan (2006-2010):** This plan is one element in the ADB-funded EEQP Project (a 6-year initiative running Sept. 2008–Oct. 2014) (MoEYS, 2011). The primary objective of the EEQP is “to increase the number of better educated and skilled people from all sections of Cambodia's population” (p. 3). This is to be achieved by targeting support for three major activities or components, each led by a different MoEYS department. Those three components are: (1) education systems management and development; (2) professional development of teachers; and (3) strengthening secondary education. Gender mainstreaming is to be a part of the first component of enhancing systems management. The main route specified for this is to “establish and disseminate to various stakeholders a gender mainstreaming document” (p. 4). Again, such goals seem too vague to be meaningful, and in actuality, require little or no change.

When asked how gender mainstreaming was actually being accomplished by MoEYS, Head of the Gender Working Group was most enthusiastic about a training initiative for “women in leadership” and “girls’ councils” as mechanisms for increasing female participation in educational decision-making, as well as “awareness raising efforts for all MoEYS staff”. This is another example of the tendency to locate impetus for gender change with females, and to neglect males almost entirely. It is also another example of where “training” is regarded as a solution for “low capacity”.

This perception of gender mainstreaming as a (quick and easy) technical fix comprised of new structures, projects, and activities (rather than a transformative shift) is, apparently, not a rare interpretation in low- and middle-income nations (Cornwall, Harrison & Whitehead, 2007; Karlsson, 2010; Unterhalter & North, 2010). Gender mainstreaming efforts in these national contexts tend to be top-down, structurally rather than substantively focused, under-
funded, and uneven. When gender is made the responsibility of a special department, and especially in a national context where the concept of gender is not well understood and even less appreciated, gender concerns are not so much integrated or “mainstreamed” as sidelined and marginalised in its independence (Mukhopadhyay, 2007). What Karlsson (2010) observes in South Africa is a caution applicable to the situation in Cambodia. She states that “it is necessary to establish a gender machinery; but to over-invest in the structural web and managing events and campaigns puts at risk the transformative potential in gender mainstreaming at local…level” (p. 510).

From a case study closer to home, Silfver (2010) writing on neighbouring Lao People’s Democratic Republic (PDR) suggests that genuine and effective gender mainstreaming requires a concerted focus on contextual circumstances in order avoid enforcing neo-colonial legacies and to instead become a useful vehicle for genuine social transformation. Her conclusion was that “…it is not I who should formulate what gender could mean in educational development cooperation in Laos. This is a task for my Lao colleagues” (p. 492). For Lao in particular, she suggests that three critical contextual factors unaccounted for in her [Western European] government’s form of gender mainstreaming that she was attempting to facilitate, but relevant to Lao PDR are status, ethnicity, and kinship (2010, p. 493). Silfver’s perspective readily applies to Cambodia.

**National curriculum: Influence of Men’s Law/Women’s Law**

It is commonly, though erroneously, believed that the *Chbap Srey* (“law about/for women”) is taught as part of the national primary and high school curriculum. During the course of this research, the majority of expatriates, as well as Khmer asked in informal settings (those excluding research site residents), indicated that they thought the *Chbap Srey* was
included in the national curriculum. In some cases, Khmer respondents said that they remember reading about it in their textbooks when they were in school. Analysis of current textbooks for grades 4-6 demonstrated, however, that the *Chbap Srey* is not explicitly mentioned or included in any textbooks. However, there are two references to the *Chbap Pro* (Grade 4 Khmer, p. 41; Grade 6 Khmer, p. 43). In both cases the excerpt is labelled “Poem about Men’s Law” (rather than stating that it is a Law for Men); in each case the instructions are directed to “people”, specifying age (as in: “instructions for children and for adults”) but not sex.

This popular conception was vigorously contested by various officials in the Ministry of Education, both in spirit and in practice: “MoEYS has been accused by some of trying to use *Chbap Srey* to show that women are inferior, but MoEYS is trying to teach equality….In this era we focus on gender, women’s rights, children’s rights…” (I-P39).

She went on to explain that neither *Chbap Pro* nor *Chbap Srey* are taught in primary school because “it would be too complicated for young children; they could not understand it” (I-P39). She indicated that excerpts of both texts are included in the lower secondary and high school curricula and texts within the subject of Khmer language as they are “poems”, and that after high school, *Chbap Srey/Chbap Pro* are taught at university level in the context of history. Excerpts included in the curriculum:

- relate to the need to work hard: for example, students read about importance of women keeping things neat at home. While the purpose of the *Chbap Srey* is to show how a wife must serve her husband, we don’t teach this in the curriculum. We want women and men to help each other. The *Chbap Srey* tells women [sic] to respect her husband no matter what; but that is in the past. Now we know about equality. We try not to include the weak points of women that are shown in Chbap Srey; we don’t want to show that women are inferior to men [because they are equal].
- For the *Chbap Pro* (Men’s Law), whatever is taught is related to the need to work hard: for example, students read about importance of men knowing how to make
income for family, taking care of property, don’t have sex with other women [other than your wife], don’t gamble. Like that. (I-P39)

Regardless of whether or not these traditional moral laws are formally taught in school, the *Chbap Srey* in particular is still commonly referenced in ordinary conversation, the sentiments echoed in numerous proverbs and sayings, and many people, women and men, believe that it is “good moral teaching and should be kept as part of [Cambodian] cultural identity” (Kasumi, 2006, p. 25; see also Walsh, 2007).

**Local/Grassroots Perspectives on Gender**

Understanding of the concept of gender at the practical level of implementation, whether held by teachers or students, was similar – gender was understood in strictly quantitative terms of equal numbers of male and female students. Understanding did not extend much beyond this simplistic equation. A more nuanced appreciation including the issue of quality of participation was not evident in discussions. Overall, males were characterised as “strong” and females as ‘weak’ (read: superior | inferior]; males as unruly and undisciplined, females as docile and conscientious with school work; males as active, females as passive.

**Teacher perspectives on gender**

Application of the concept of gender or of “gender equality” did not appear to extend very far beyond the primary school classroom, that is, it did not include consideration of “women” and the administrative level of the school’s, much less the nation’s, education system and the larger Ministry. Teachers, again, felt that because there was a preponderance of female teachers in primary school classrooms, that “equality” was being achieved. They had appeared to not have considered the phenomenon of the inverse proportion of teachers (there are more male than female) in grades beyond the primary level, and in higher education; nor had they
noticed that administrative positions, and especially the positions of Director and Vice
Director, are an almost exclusively male domain.

In conversation with teachers it was clear that they see gender [almost] exclusively in
terms of “girls” and of “numbers” – that is, gender means getting girls enrolled in school and
having equal numbers of girls and boys assigned to groups, both boys and girls acting as group
leaders, and so forth. The fact that many primary classes at Sala Phum contained more girls
than boys led teachers to be somewhat dismissive of the concept: they believe they have
achieved what MoEYS set out for them with its call to gender, namely, getting girls to school.

Initially, teachers in a series of focus group discussions about gender unanimously
expressed a theoretical understanding of gender as “equality between the sexes” (same-ness);
and also expressed agreement with the general notion of “gender equality:”

- “Jendah means equal between male and female.” (G-B1, male teachers).
- “We think about values and respect, not about whether someone is male or
female.” (G-P16, male teachers)
- “…if you mention about the character of female and male teachers, then they are
the same. If you mention about the level of knowledge, the male and female
teachers also are equal because they all went to same training [Teacher Training
College]. All teachers are trained the same; so all teachers work the same in
classroom.” (G-P22, female teachers).

It did not take long, though, before actual perceptions surfaced, and these can be loosely
summarised as “women weak, men strong” (read: inferior | superior):

- Teachers: “The curriculum and textbooks do not relate to women or men; work
can be done by both sexes. But women can’t do very heavy work like men can.
Women are weak.” (G-P16, male teachers)
- Teachers: “CFS Dimension 4 says we must have equality; but we know that a
woman can’t do the same heavy work as men [they then refer to a lesson where a
male carries an 80 kg. sack of rice and a female is shown as unable to lift this
same weight].” (G-P16, male teachers)

This same ambivalence spills over to perspectives about equality amongst males and females at
student level. One teacher at Sala Phum said, in response to the question of whether or not
boys and girls are equal”, exclaimed: “Yes, they both have rights! If boys can do it, girls can do it too! But for real activity, this is not the way. [In real life] boys can climb trees but girls cannot. Girls are weak.” (G-P22, female teachers)

Additionally, there remains at village level, minimal contestation of gendered roles which disadvantage females, and a prevailing collective shrug about the existing order of things. For instance, men and women in Focus Groups both readily acknowledged that female teachers have greater challenges to performing their teaching role than male teachers because women’s domestic responsibilities are much more demanding (leaving less time/energy for school, and making it difficult to arrive on time): however, no one suggested that this taken-for-granted natural order could or should be altered. More worrying, female teachers at Sala Phum and cluster schools seemed nearly unable to conceptualise themselves as being able to carry out the responsibilities of administrative positions – expressing this as due to lack of desire, limited experience “with documents”, time constraints (read: domestic obligations), and lack of necessary skills (“men write more neatly and more quickly than women”).

Males are considered more important, more valuable than females. For instance, when describing double-jobbing, teachers in all FGD did not refer to women’s domestic labour or income-generating activities (often described as consisting of “selling small things by the house”) as “work” (kangiya); whereas the male activity of driving moto-dope or ramorque was called “work”, and considered to be more physically demanding then what women do, as well as being important because it generates cash. Further, teacher explanations about why more males than females are in administrative positions also illuminate deeply held beliefs about the abilities of males and females, and the “natural order of things” – see Table 32 below. These statements are representative of all FGD results; they demonstrate that a significant gap
remains between awareness and systematic implementation of genuinely gender-sensitive relations and activities throughout the educational system.

Table 32: Teacher explanations for male prevalence in administrative positions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher explanations for why more males than females are in administrative positions</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Respondent group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reasons related to logistics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women want to be close to home so they can care for small children.</td>
<td>G-P22 female teachers; G-P16 male teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men can travel anywhere; not secure for women to travel.</td>
<td>G-P22, female teachers; G-B1 male teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men are already in administrative positions, so women don’t want that work.</td>
<td>G-P15 female teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women don’t want to travel to meetings.</td>
<td>G-B1 male teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior skills and knowledge of males</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men are better at planning.</td>
<td>G-P15 female teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men write more neatly.</td>
<td>G-P22 female teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is too much responsibility to be the Director.</td>
<td>G-B1 male teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men are faster than women at doing reports.</td>
<td>G-P16 male teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men have more time to do that work; moreover they are better at it.</td>
<td>G-P15 female teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men have more experience/knowledge than women.</td>
<td>G-P22 female teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men have more experience in these positions so they are the ones to get promoted.</td>
<td>G-B1 male teachers; G-P16 male teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women don’t want to do administrative work; don’t like administrative work; find administrative work too difficult.</td>
<td>G-P15 female teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Connections” favour males</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males have more money and more kasaye (connections, networks) than females so they can bribe and network to get administrative positions whereas women cannot.</td>
<td>G-P15 female teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher FGD participants in all four groups, two from Sala Phum and two from the central cluster school, were asked to state whether they think there are any differences between male teachers and female teachers, and then to describe differences, if any. Initial response from all groups was along the lines of “the most important thing is not whether the teacher is male or female, but the experience of the teacher” (G-B1, male teachers) and “knowledge and
character of male and female teachers is the same” (G-P22, female teachers). However, very quickly teachers cited numerous differences and were then unanimous that clear differences do exist. Responses related to practical matters such as logistics, attitude toward and treatment of students, and general deportment.

Male teachers were regarded as “more flexible with work” because they can travel greater distances than women and be assigned farther from their ‘place of origin’ than female teachers on account of security (G-P22, female teachers). All four FGD stated that it considered risky for single female teachers to live away from their family and birthplace (the implicit risk is largely seen to be sexual molestation).

A common description of differences was that female teachers speak gently to students; they do not make fun of students whereas male teachers do mock students sometimes and joke around with students (G-P15, female teachers). At the same time, male teachers were more frequently described as more strict and more serious than female teachers (G-B1, male teachers; G-P15, female teachers).

Female teachers are said to be more naturally shy (aht hien = without courage; or kmah eyen = shy) and more uncomfortable with teaching students about the topic of sex than male teachers (G-P16, male teachers). Male teachers said they did not think that female students would have difficult talking to them about personal problems or ‘female issues’ (G-P16, male teachers). However, their view contrasted with female teachers who said that girl students are very reticent to talk with their male teachers about personal issues (G-P15, female teachers). Both male and female teachers agreed that girls were more likely than boys to talk to teachers (regardless of sex) about domestic issues or problems.
Teacher views of gendered behaviour among students

The main difference for students, as stated both by students and teachers regardless of whether they are male or female is that: boys play, do not listen, don’t care; girls pay attention, obey, focus on school work. This appeared to be more than simple description, but rather an expression of tacit approval (or resignation?) – a Khmer “boys will be boys” attitude. Girls were consistently said to be “smarter” in the sense of achieving better grades – however, “smart” in relation to girls was frequently associated with compliance, docility, obedience, and industriousness. See Table 33 for a more detailed description of these perceived differences.

Table 33: Teacher descriptions of differences between male and female students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher descriptions of differences between male and female students</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Respondent group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Differences in character</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is easier to teach girls than boys because girls are more careful.</td>
<td>P22 female teacher FGD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls are more focused than boys</td>
<td>P22 female teacher FGD; B1 male teacher FGD; P15 female teacher FGD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls are more afraid in class than boys are; because they are afraid, girls listen better than boys do!</td>
<td>B1 male teacher FGD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character of girls is that they like to study more and they understand more than boys do; girls understand better the value of education.</td>
<td>B1 male FGD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls are more gentle than boys: the character of boys is <em>cull</em> (naughty) in contrast to girls who are <em>sloat boat</em> (gentle).</td>
<td>B1 male teacher FGD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character of girls is that they are more respectful; boys’ character is that they are not respectful and they don’t listen to teacher/s.</td>
<td>P22 female teacher FGD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences in behavioural inclination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More girls than boys do their homework assignments.</td>
<td>P15 female teacher FGD; B1 male teacher FGD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More girl than boy students are on time to class.</td>
<td>B1 male teacher FGD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys don’t play so much if put in groups with girls (to do group work).</td>
<td>P15 female teacher FGD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At break-time boys run to the playground while girls are more likely to stay behind in the classroom and ask school questions to the teacher.</td>
<td>P15 female teacher FGD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Teacher descriptions of differences between male and female students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Respondent group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Differences in skills</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls are more clever than boys; they are more often at #1 or #2 in class ranking.</td>
<td>P15 female teacher FGD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls complete their lessons faster than boys.</td>
<td>P22 female teacher FGD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys are more careless with work than girls.</td>
<td>P16 female teacher FGD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More girls than boys volunteer to answer questions because girls are smarter and know the answers.</td>
<td>P22 female teacher FGD; P15 female teacher FGD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are more boy than girl students among those classified as “weak students.”</td>
<td>P15 female teacher FGD; P16 female teacher FGD; P22; B1 male teacher FGD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls respond better to loud voice of teacher than do boys. Boys respond, but only temporarily and then go back to their bad behaviour.</td>
<td>P22 female teacher FGD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The responses to why there are differences, or why males and females do not do the same thing/s or have the same kind of behaviour or inclinations tended to be framed in simplistic terms of “inherent nature”. For instance, “girls like [sewing, cooking] therefore they want to do it” or “boys are better at that [game] therefore they play and girls don’t.” Some blame was also attributed categorically to family – for instance, “Parents do not motivate their sons to study hard, so to some extent male behaviour is the fault of parents…” (G-B1, male teachers). And when asked why boys are (unruly, undisciplined), teachers responded: “It is their habit; and parents do not control their boys” (G-P15, female teacher G-P16, male teachers). Perhaps projecting their own views on their students, teachers agreed that it is their perception that students generally regard male teachers as more strict than female teachers; and female teachers as more gentle than male teachers.

And finally, as an example of where viewing “equality” as “sameness” is not helpful, comes from an FGD with male teachers who, almost all, said they did not think that girls would have difficulty/discomfort in talking to them about questions relating to lessons about

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45 There were two exceptions to this, voiced by individual teachers in two different FGD; one male FGD and one female FGD. Otherwise, all other teachers agreed with the idea that “girls are smarter/more clever than boys.”
sexual health and reproduction. This contrasted both with what girl students themselves said, as well as what female teachers said about female students.

**Student perspectives on gender**

Student understandings about gender were very similar to teacher perspectives, though with perhaps less of a judgmental aspect; that is, children clearly saw differences but were not necessarily as quick as adults to assign a value (positive or negative) to the differences. Females were associated with appearance, docility, domestic work, and fearfulness, while males were associated with physical strength, vigour, and a degree of unruliness.

To gain understanding about how children see socially constructed expectations of males and females, and whether there are any differences, the researchers asked children to describe and draw a “good boy” and a “good girl.” The details are included below in Table 34 which is organised to show differences between responses of boys and responses of girls. Both boy and girl FGD participants responded about both questions. Responses to the question of what is a “good boy” and a “good girl,” from both boys’ and girls’ FGDs tended to be about adults as well as children – for instance, drinking and gambling came up immediately as things a “good boy” should not do, and yet it is not common for children, male or female, to do either one of those activities until they are in their teens. The lists of characteristics generated by both were surprisingly similar. Eventually, when asked specifically, children said that there is no difference in requirements to be a “good boy”/“good girl.” But during the initial response time, there were distinct substantive differences in what they said – it could be summarised that “good girl” characteristics were about deportment and relationships (“do not be too frivolous or playful”); “good boy” characteristics were about being peaceful (do not argue or fight with one another; should not go dahlayng; do not gamble or drink).
Three features assigned by FGD participants to girls but not to boys were: 1) obey your mother; and 2) do not make your parents anxious; and 3) help with housework. The two features assigned to boys but not girls were do not gamble and do not drink alcohol. In contrast to “good girls” who are to be “gentle,” “good boys” are to be “faithful, loyal, and brave.” A final note: while appropriate dress was cited as necessary for both sexes as a necessity, girls were described as needing to wear “more beautiful clothes than boys.”

Table 34: Compilation of responses about “good girl”/“good boy” characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compilation of description of good girls / good boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be kind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help friends when they have problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not look down on anyone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not be proud.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful to parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obey your mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not make your parents anxious or stressed. (min che tve owee apoke medeye pik bak chet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love friends and parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not be a robber; not stealing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in conflict or argument with anyone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help parents with work at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help with housework at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t go out at night (dahlayng)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be gentle (“good heart, soft heart”).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study hard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wear beautiful clothes to school (“more beautiful than what boys wear”).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Responses from student FGD about differences between how boys and girls act in the classroom did not deviate from the prevailing view of boys as strong, active, unruly and girls as weak, passive, and docile. See Table 35 for detailed descriptions provided by students.

**Table 35: Student perceptions of gender-differentiated classroom behaviour**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student perceptions of gender-differentiated classroom behaviour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Girls in the classroom</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Girls are more clever than boys at school work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Girls study more; listen to teacher better/more; are gentle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Girls are more brave to volunteer to go and write on the board.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Girls are more industrious/try harder than boys at school/in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While both boys and girls reported that they “work at home” and “are responsible to help at home,” from a very early age the nature of their work appeared to be different. When they are in grade school, both boys and girls: cook rice, wash dishes, sweep the yard and house. However, girls clean inside the house more often than boys; one reason given for this was that “girls work more industriously than boys do at housework.” Both boys and girls said that they wash clothes (though girls reportedly do this more often). Both boys and girls are tasked with watching smaller siblings, but girls do this more often “because the small children like girls better.” Boys and girls reported that “boys do ‘heavy work’ like cutting wood and carrying water” because “girls are not strong enough to do this.”

Another interesting distinction made during discussion about this question was that “boys watch cows; girls can’t/don’t watch cows.” When pressed, children reported that it is because “girls are afraid of cows, afraid they might be hurt by the cow;” “girls are afraid that
they will turn black” (sun). And, there is fear for girls’ security – they are vulnerable to being “caught” (sexually molested) if they are away from home without friends or family around.

Overwhelmingly, both boy and girl students perceived that teachers (regardless of gender) gave preferential treatment to girls. Teachers are described as being “happier/more pleased” with girl students than boy students. Furthermore, “teachers like girls better because girls are more clever; girls are smarter while boys play more and don’t listen well in class.” Students also felt that teachers are more likely to explain questions asked by girls than questions asked by boys; and that teachers more frequently call on girls to go up to the board and/or to answer questions than they call on boys.

In same-sex FGD, students were given ten minutes to draw a picture of their “favourite teacher”; and then another ten minutes to write a simple description of that teacher. Of the 76 respondents (37 girls, 39 boys): 30 specified their favourite teacher was female, 29 specified a male teacher was their favourite, 16 children put a question mark to indicate that it doesn’t matter if teacher is male/female, and one student specified that both male and female teachers are favourite.

Most characteristics cited by the children can be grouped into four main categories: ability, attitude/character, physical appearance and good speech, discipline as shown below in Table 36. There did not appear to be any direct correlation between characteristics and teacher gender (male/female). In addition, several students in one FGD noted that they appreciate a teacher’s equitable and fair treatment of students – expressed as (variations on) “loves all students equally.” And a few comments across FGD related to the “approachability” of a teacher – students felt like they could get individualised assistance from a teacher if they required it.
Table 36: Student descriptions of “favourite teacher”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of teacher characteristics appreciated by students</th>
<th>Details/examples of statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Ability                                                  | Many of the 39 respondents gave variations on the idea that “teacher explains well/clearly so that we understand quickly.” Other points relating to a teacher’s ability included:  
  - Teacher has vinay (orderly, systematic).  
  - Teaches in a focused, concentrated way [yang p’chet p’chang; yok chet tok dak].  
  - Teacher manages the class well.  
  - Teacher gives us good ideas.  
  - My favourite teacher “teaches hard” [makes a great effort to teach].  
  - Teacher can read better than the other teachers.  
  - Teacher is good at asking questions to students. |
| Attitude/character:                                      | A total of 39 students mentioned teacher attitude or character descriptions, and many of the 39 mentioned more than one.  
  - By far the most frequent characteristic cited was “gentle”.  
  - Other common responses included kind, honest, just/fair, encouraging, good person, nice to me. |
| Appearance/speech:                                       | Most of the 16 students who referred to appearance said something approximating: “Teacher is beautiful/handsome”.  
  - Other descriptions included: tan not black, tall, and “dresses nicely.”  
  - One quarter of the respondents in this category referred to “good/ tender/ beautiful speech.” |
| Discipline:                                              | A total of 17 students referenced “discipline”.  
  - In one case, a student referred to a teacher’s use of discipline as positive: “I like my teacher because my teacher is strict and hits me”.  
  - In four cases, students described this favourite teacher as “strict [tendency toward violence].”  
  - In all other cases, the commonly appreciated characteristic related to dearth of violence: “never hits us”; “doesn’t use violence”; “does not curse students”; “teacher does not get angry.” |

Gendered classroom and school grounds activities

Numerous instances of sex-differentiated behaviour occur throughout a school day. For example, when lining up for the daily flag raising ceremony and for entering the classroom,
primary school boys and girls form separate lines. In addition, during break times children quickly move to largely gender-specific groups to play games; and games seldom transcend gender barriers (girls play certain games, boys play other games). While there may be practical reasons for such different activities, it is also apparent that some of the rationale is more subjective than objective, implicit rather than explicit, and based on deeply held socio-cultural beliefs, rather than modern, progressive views (read: Western human-rights based approach) of how males and females should relate to one another.

Teachers assign children chores based on cultural stereotypes: for instance, teachers tell boys to carry water to fill the bathroom cistern or water plants in the school-yard, while girls are told to sweep out the classroom. Girls and boys both explain that this is done because “girls are not as strong as boys.” However, in actual practice, girls do often water plants and carry water from the pump to the toilet block and boys do sometimes sweep classrooms and school yards. Reasons that students gave for why girls and boys do different kinds of chores, included:

- Girls do most of cleaning because “boys are too lazy to clean.”
- Boys more often fill water buckets “because girls can’t pick up the buckets as they are too heavy when full.”
- “Girls are weaker [than boys] and cannot carry heavy things.”
- “Boys have energy to do labouring type of work (polekam).”
- “Girls serve more from their heart than boys do.”
- “Girls are not as energetic as boys.”

Often teachers assign student seating arrangements. It was not uncommon to hear teachers explain that they put boy-girl pairs together explicitly to control boys’ activity (“boys listen more when they are sitting beside girls than when they sit with each other”). Where students are given a choice, then girls sit together and boys sit together; they do not mix unless required by a teacher to do so.
As for games at recess, there is a very clear distinction as expressed by children, for what games girls/boys play and when they can mix/cannot mix. Children were also able to easily articulate reasons for why some games are more appropriate for girls, and some more appropriate for boys. There was no disagreement between boys and girls in their explanation of games and reasons. Information in Table 37 below is a partial, rather than exhaustive, representation of games played and the accompanying explanation comes from the children themselves.

**Table 37: Games children play – by sex, with explanation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game</th>
<th>Who plays</th>
<th>Explanation from children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Jacks (layng pak or chak pak)      | Girls usually; infrequently boys were seen playing too, but always in mixed company.   | ▪ Girls have better skills; boys don’t like it.  
▪ Girls have softer hands than boys, so they are more clever at game of jacks |
| Rubber-band jump-rope (lotte kowsu)| Girls usually; infrequently boys were seen playing too, but always in mixed company.   | ▪ Girls want to play – it is their feeling.  
▪ Girls can jump higher so boys are not as good at this game as girls are. |
| Marbles (byng klee)                | Boys only.                                     | ▪ Boys have more energy;  
▪ Girls do not have strong enough fingers to shoot properly; girls cannot shoot as straight as boys.  
▪ Boys said: we laugh because the girls fail when they try to play. |
| Throwing shoes at a can (koup kampong stop) | Both reported to play; only boys were observed play this game. | Girls can’t throw very far |
| Shoe and money game – kick shoes to hit a can (Layng chuu) | Only boys. | Girls are afraid to hurt their foot; boys don’t hurt their feet when kicking so they are better. |
| Dig a hole and put stones in the hole (bye kome) | Reportedly, mostly girls play this game but sometimes boys too (NB. The research team did not observe this game being played.) | Girls like it because girls are not as strong as boys – girls like games that take less energy. |
### Games children play

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game</th>
<th>Who plays</th>
<th>Explanation from children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hide your own teeth and try to make others smile to show their teeth (<em>lyang hap</em>)</td>
<td>Boys and girls.</td>
<td>Girls are more calm and can remain without laughing; boys are easy to make laugh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Card game where players throw down the cards to make a loud noise (<em>bouk rupe</em>).</td>
<td>Boys only.</td>
<td>Boys like it (because of pictures of big muscled men in underwear on the cards) and girls do not because they are embarrassed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>Boys only.</td>
<td>• Boys have more energy to play than girls do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Soccer is dangerous; girls might get hurt and cry (that is why girls do not play soccer).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hopscotch (<em>layng muke</em>)</td>
<td>Told that only girls play; however, observed while it’s usually played by girls, sometimes boys will play in mixed sex group (boys never observed playing without girls).</td>
<td>Boys are too strong for hopscotch, they throw the stone too far so they cannot play this game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General disposition to games and play</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Boys like to use energy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Boys are faster; girls are slower at running.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• In one case: boys don’t like it because it is a girls’ game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Boys are more brave than girls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tug-of-war (<em>layng pro-aht</em>)</td>
<td>Played only during Khmer New year; girls and boys play in opposition to each other.</td>
<td>Boys always win because they are stronger.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Hidden curriculum

Strong gender stereotyping characterises many aspects of the formal education enterprise in Cambodia, obvious in the structure of daily events, textbook narrative and illustrations, how teachers perceive male/female teachers function, how teachers interact with children, the selection of life-skills options, and in how children regard and interact with each other. For instance, in the research village, grandmothers explaining *Ayaye*, a special type of
antiphonal singing/dancing where females ask and males answer said: “Because males have more knowledge than females, therefore they are the ones to answer. Always the males enter first; then males invite females; then females begin asking questions. Usually, the song begins with female saying, ‘You are knowledgeable, so I have a question to ask…’” (I-P80).

One KAPE staff member explained a project KAPE ran to prevent girls from dropping out of school at the lower secondary level. It was called “teaching crafts” and consisted of teaching girls how to crochet and how to make 3-dimensional paper flowers. This class was initiated because “it is interesting to the girls so they keep joining. Also, they can sell something at festival time and get a little income.” Another strong rationale was “parents want their daughters to learn these things so they will keep sending girls to school.”

This same KAPE staff passionately explained another more recent project whereby girls in Grades 5 and 6 are taught tailoring. Again, the purpose is to keep girls at risk of dropping out (exhibited by irregular attendance), in school. The course is run three hours every Thursday, for ten weeks. The girls are taught to sew clothes by hand. “The girls are so proud, they are so happy when they can complete a shirt!” the female programme office enthused. When asked why other skills are not featured, the KAPE staff said that it was because “this is what girls like to do.”

Sala Phum’s Director reported that life skills are currently not offered at Sala Phum, and have only ever been available to students intermittently, as they are dependent upon external funding. One year ago, the school offered tailoring class for girls and a cooking class also for girls. Apparently no life skill classes were offered for boys. Without external funding, it is only possible for the school to offer “easy life skills” such as teaching children to grow
vegetables and clean the yard; hygiene is considered a “life skill” and they teach this to all
the children.

One day the RT observed that one Grade 4 female teacher in a cluster school brought
one of her 7-month old boy twins to class. This teacher explained that she brings one of her
infants to class each day because caregivers at home cannot care for the boys simultaneously.
For about half the class period, the teacher cradled the infant in her arms. Then she laid the
child down on front-row desk where two girls were sitting; though no words were exchanged,
the two girls immediately began to care for and play with the child and no longer gave their
attention to the lesson. Assuming that this is an ordinary event, it is both indicative of the
logistical difficulties rural teachers face; as well as an indicator of the strong role-type casting
that occurs in Cambodia from a very young age.

There were occasional instances of inappropriate gender-based comments both by
teachers and students that went unchallenged. For example, during a Grade 6 social studies
lesson about HIV/AIDS boy said that AIDS is increasing in Cambodia “because of bar girls
and prostitutes” (this boy used the slang word for prostitute, srey koich, which literally
translates as “broken woman”). Everyone in the class laughed, including the male teacher.
Then the teacher joked – “how do you know, are you visiting bar girls and prostitutes?” There
was more nervous laughter, and no attempt to analyse the boy’s assertion which at the very
least is factually erroneous, and at worst, reinforces the notion of women as responsible for
rampant sexual promiscuity on which social demise is blamed. A second example occurred
during a Khmer language lesson for Grade 5 students. While discussing indigenous ethnic
minorities and differences in livelihood between lowland Khmer and highland minorities, a
teacher said: “Sticky rice is called ‘female’ because it is sticky and soft like a girl.” The class
was seized with nervous laughter. No one challenged the teacher’s pejorative statement which clearly had an inappropriate sexual innuendo. It is difficult to know the influence of such insensitive, stereotypical comments, especially if they are verbalised regularly. Certainly comments of this nature would contribute little to appreciation for gender equality.

**Gender Analysis of Textbooks**

The research team analysed all 12 textbooks used in Grades 4-6 (Social Studies, Khmer language, Mathematics, Science). Taken together, narrative and illustrations in the textbooks demonstrate some, but minimal, modification of, or challenge to, “traditional” perspectives on gender. That is, textbooks mirror rather than actively challenge the prevailing social norms of males valued more highly than females; males in the public sphere and females relegated to the private sphere; males in roles of authority and power and females defined in terms of physical attributes or relationship to males in authority. Further, historical figures are with few exceptions, exclusively male; females more frequently than males are pictured wearing traditional clothing; and both girls and women are depicted as generally less active than boys and men.

Official perceptions of gender in textbooks differed significantly from researcher perspectives. Both MoEYS official at central level, and teachers and school administrators at actual school/village level observed that in their view, textbooks provide a realistic picture of current life in Cambodia. Further, they demonstrated a limited understanding of the concept of gender. Teachers and education officials also had difficulty with the idea that existing materials and practices could have potentially deleterious effects on the children and adults.

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46 The primary school textbooks analysed were produced during different years; the researchers reviewed the versions that were in use at Sala Phum, although newer versions might be available. All Grade 4 texts reviewed were published in 2010, Grade 5 textbooks were published in 2008 except Math produced in 2007. For Grade 6, the Khmer text was published in 2001, Math in 2007, Science and Social Studies in 2008.
who use them, through reinforcement of the widely accepted notion of male superiority/female
inferiority. There was tacit belief that existing curricula and textbooks are “neutral” in their
portrayal of “reality.”

**Scribing gender: Textbook narratives**

Analysis of textual content in the Grade 4-6 textbooks show a conspicuous absence of
any positive/strong female historical figures, though they do feature numerous male historical
figures and portray males as (naturally) comprising armies. In just one grade (six) and one
subject (Social Studies) there are (three) instances where female historical figures are
mentioned, but never as positive models. One of these is actually an anti-hero and in a second
story, women provoke conflict. In none of the three cases are the female/s named. Differences
in portrayal of historic male and female figures are demonstrated in Table 38 below. The
glaring omission of women, and the legitimate possibility of writing different historical
accounts that not only include females but demonstrates them as being central to Cambodia’s
political, social, economic, and moral order, is increasingly the topic of foreign (but not
Cambodian) scholarship. See for instance, Jacobsen’s *Lost Goddesses* (2008) and Thompson’s
(2000) work on (re)writing histories of Middle Cambodia.

In a related twist, the Grade 5 Khmer text has a lesson about “Geniuses and their works
of art” (p. 116). The gist of the text is that people (*m’new*, a generic Khmer word that literally
means “people” and has no gendered inference) leave their great works of art and genius to the
next generation – these works can include sculpture, dancing, songs, music, and movies.
However the subsequent three “geniuses” featured are male (p. 117-120): Mr. Sen Sisamut, a
“golden voiced singer” killed during the Pol Pot era; Mr. Jeak Deam, a painter who also died
under Pol Pot; and Mr. Rang Say, a painter, novelist, and poet who was famous in the early
1900s. Likewise, the Grade 5 Social Studies text (p. 22) has a lesson about scientists and how important they are for developing a nation. The text contains no gendered pronouns until it suddenly mentions Louis Pasteur as the example: and the accompanying illustration is a large drawing of a very old, bespectacled (Caucasian?) male professor in a lab coat.

Table 38: Contrast in portrayal of historic references/figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference to male historical figures</th>
<th>Reference to female historical figures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Short biography of Mr. Reav Keas who was the Minister of Economy in 1947-1949. <em>(Grade 5 Khmer, p. 135)</em></td>
<td>▪ Story of conflict amongst the Cambodian royal family, provoked by manipulative wives of kings, which results in Vietnamese troops interfering in Cambodia. <em>(Grade 6 Social Studies, p. 40-41)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ A litany of disasters that befell Cambodia after the death of [male] King Jayavarman VII. That king’s successor was another male, King Trasak Payem, who was not a very powerful ruler. <em>(Grade 5 Social Studies, p. 16-17)</em></td>
<td>▪ Describes Cambodia under Vietnamese colonisation, then Cambodian King Chan dies. He has no sons, only daughters so Vietnam gives the throne to Chan’s second daughter. During her reign the Vietnamese try to force the Khmer to change their traditions. A rebellion arises and the Thai intervene and take control. <em>(Grade 6 Social Studies, p. 85)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ King Pun yea Yat defeated Siam and thereby regained control of the Angkor Kingdom. <em>(Grade 5 Social Studies, p. 27)</em></td>
<td>▪ In describing the process of Cambodia’s gaining independence the text speaks of “women who joined Sihanouk’s military to help gain independence.” These women are not named, but are described as <em>pole neary kla-haan</em> (“brave women in the army”). <em>(Grade 6 Social Studies, p. 103-104)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ This lesson is about Cambodia during Chaktomuk era, and it explains male primogeniture as the natural political order. <em>(Grade 5 Social Studies, p. 31)</em></td>
<td>▪ Describes Cambodia during Levuk era as a period in which kings (male) and armies (all male) are fighting. <em>(Grade 5 Social Studies, p. 46)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Describes Cambodia during Levuk era as a period in which kings (male) and armies (all male) are fighting. <em>(Grade 5 Social Studies, p. 46)</em></td>
<td>▪ A brief history of Cambodia mentions that among all of Cambodia’s past, the Angkor Era was most prosperous because there were many good kings. <em>(Grade 6 Social Studies, p. 14-15)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ A brief retelling of the history of Cambodia under French colonisation which covers the period 1963-1941: no women at all are mentioned but a list of kings is included. <em>(Grade 6 Social Studies, p. 93-94)</em></td>
<td>▪ A brief history of Cambodia mentions that among all of Cambodia’s past, the Angkor Era was most prosperous because there were many good kings. <em>(Grade 6 Social Studies, p. 14-15)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only two folk-stories celebrate female heroes; all other heroes are male. One female hero *(Grade 5 Khmer, p. 83)* is described as the “clever daughter of a millionaire father” and she is smart enough to dispel mosquitoes from the world. This is unusual for textbook content as the focus is not on the woman’s appearance, but rather on her ingenuity and intelligence.
The second reference to a female hero is more oblique. In the narrative of an historical event in which a male soldier is the hero, the illustration implicitly conjures for the readers, reference to Ms. Yei Mou, an historical female figure who is a hero because she volunteers to give up her own life for other people (Grade 5 Khmer, p. 152-154).

Traditional tales featured in the texts tend to portray males in positions of power, authority, and strength. Women, if mentioned, are seldom named and usually described in terms of “feminine” physical attributes rather than intellectual prowess or character traits. An example from each grade is cited in Table 39 below.

There are a small number of instances where women (wives) “brave” and “clever” intervene for their husband/s but the husband/s are given public credit and wives remain invisible. One is the story of Mr. Kong Hen who faints in fear at the sight of a tiger, so his two wives must kill the tiger. The husband gets public praise and credit for this courageous deed. The king notices Mr. Kong Hen and puts him in charge of a war; because the man’s wives help him once more, the war is won (Grade 5 Khmer, p. 150). The implicit message is that women do not need recognition because a woman’s “proper role” is supporter of her husband. A second example of this is slightly more egalitarian (Grade 6 Khmer, p. 133). In this story, a man named as “Uncle May and family” (none of whom are named) are poor because Mr. May’s work of panning for gems is not going well. Mr. May’s wife (not named) has the idea to dig for gems near the house; thereupon Mr. May finds a big ruby; he sells it; then proceeds to set his wife up in a small business and he becomes a jeweller. The family lives very happily together after this.

47 This is one of two stories in the 12 texts that portray a man with multiple wives. No comment is made about bigamy; rather, it is portrayed as an historic or traditional norm.
### Table 39: Contrasting description of males/females in traditional tales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contrast in the way that males and females are described in traditional tales</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Grade 4 Khmer, p. 116.** | - Males have greater agency than females.  
- Males are depicted as rescuers; females cannot save themselves.  
- Females depicted in terms of physical appearance and morality.  
- It is important to note that this story is an excerpt from the Cambodian epic poem Raemker, about the balance of good and evil. Not included in the illustration nor abbreviated tale in this textbook, though it would be known to all students, is the fact that Preah Ream’s wife must twice undergo tests to prove her chastity and purity to her husband. |
| In this story about the origins of mountains and rivers (Preah Ream, Preah Leak), two brothers are depicted standing with Hanuman (a monkey general, the son of the wind god), their bows and arrows pointed across the river as they are about to rescue the wife of Preah Ream from a male giant who kidnapped her. Preah Ream’s wife is “beautiful and faithful.” | |
| **Grade 5, Khmer, p. 30-31.** | - Lesson to be learned: though females may have good ideas, their “proper place” is subordinate to their husbands. Women are rightfully/appropriately in the domestic rather than public sphere – males are public figures.  
- A woman’s role is to be married; and to support her husband.  
- Males in this story are not described in terms of character, though females are. |
| Two men are best friends and each has one wife. The men are not described as other than “best friends”. One wife is described as a “good wife” (krup layak) and the other is “not a good wife” (kat layak). As in a previous tale, the man with the krup layak discusses with her how to earn money. He is the one who is then regarded as conceptualising the idea for earning money, and the couple does what he wants and become successful. | |
| **Grade 6, Khmer language, p. 123-124).** | As in many stories, females are depicted as having no voice. Decisions about their lives are made by the men in their lives – fathers first, and then husbands, then sons. |
| In a story explaining how a particular village got its name, an unnamed daughter is given away in marriage by her pottery-maker father. | |

Occasionally, a narrative features one sex exclusively, and then it is invariably males.

One example of this phenomenon is the story of an honest bus-boy who discovers the wallet a male restaurant customer has dropped and returns it to the man (Grade 4 Khmer, p. 18). In describing her perception of the activity in the story, the RA said: “men often have breakfast
out in a restaurant, men work outside, and men are literate. This action occurs outside the home, so it feels natural that only men are mentioned.” A second example is the story of brave man named Mr. Sen Hen who rescues people from starvation by killing an elephant that’s been eating their crops. After his death, a mountain is named after him as a way to celebrate his bravery. (Grade 5 Social Studies, p. 40). A third example is a story about a male hermit who becomes a judge and must judge amongst various animals (Grade 6 Khmer, p. 128-129).

Most textbooks contain examples of explicitly gender biased narrative, although it may not be viewed as such if each instance is taken independently. Only when viewed as a whole does the bias become visible. One example of this is that in the textbooks reviewed, School Directors are never female; they are always portrayed as male. Animal tales are one way around gendered messages. Occasionally the animals featured in such stories are specified as male or female, or are commonly regarded as being symbolic of male or female traits, but intentional application of this symbolism is the exception rather than the norm.

Some of the traditional songs featured in the textbooks carry an implicit gendered meaning which even primary school children are familiar with. For example, the Grade 5 Social Studies text has a song called Chav Doung (p. 40) after a flower that bears this name. The song is about flowers that are beautiful and attractive to men. The indirect meaning of this song, then, is that women must be beautiful to be attractive and desirable for men; and that being attractive to men is a suitable goal for women.

**Picturing gender: Textbook illustrations**

Analysis of illustrations reveals similar trends to analysis of the text in each textbook. The numbers of males/females included in any illustration is nearly exactly equal – to the point of looking contrived for the setting. Less prominent, but still visible, is attention to “other” –
such as indigenous ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. An example of equitable illustrations (in terms of gender) from each grade follows in Table 40. However, the characteristics and attitudes suggested in the illustrations consistently portray females as physically weaker, less intelligent, and more often than males performing in service and/or caring roles (whether in a domestic or professional setting); while depicting males as physically strong and in decision-making or authoritative roles, in the public sphere, or accessing services provided by women. Textbooks make an occasional obvious attempt to challenge traditional gender roles; often this takes the form of pictures of females in a military uniform (Grade 6 Social Studies, p. 121 is an example).

### Table 40: Examples of equitable presentation of males/females

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade/subject</th>
<th>Lesson/content</th>
<th>Description of illustration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4 (Social Studies, p. 1):</td>
<td>Lesson 1 is about the need for children to have a good attitude.</td>
<td>Illustration is of six children (5 in uniform, 1 is indigenous ethnic minority girl with basket on her back and traditional cloth dress; 4 girls, 2 boys – one boy has crutches), facing the reader with arms linked and smiling. They are standing beneath a spreading tree. In the distant background is a tiny male farmer ploughing a field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4 (Social Studies, p. 1):</td>
<td>Lesson 1 is about the need for children to have a good attitude.</td>
<td>Text is accompanied by two pictures, one of a classroom and one of a home. At home, one older brother reads a book and watches a younger sister who is playing with a doll. At school, one boy and one girl student are sweeping up a classroom. The girl is in the foreground, and a little larger than the boy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5 (Khmer, p. 50)</td>
<td>The lesson about responsibility says that to develop a country, people must be knowledgeable (che dung), have morality (mien seletowah), respect human rights (korup sut), and take responsibility (tektuel ko-trev).</td>
<td>The main illustration is of four people (2 male, 2 female; 3 are Khmer, 1 is Cham) sitting at a table. Each has a thought bubble”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6 (Khmer, p. 52)</td>
<td>This is a lesson about children of all nationalities having equal rights and duties to develop their country.</td>
<td>- The minority woman is thinking about a family (1 father beating a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Examples of equitable presentation of males/females in textbook illustrations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade/subject</th>
<th>Lesson/content</th>
<th>Description of illustration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6 (Khmer, p. 52)</td>
<td>Curiously, the minority woman pictures in her mind, scenes that contradict human rights, whilst the Khmer man pictures exemplary behaviour.</td>
<td>daughter, 1 girl carrying heavy load, 1 boy carrying something. Old Khmer man has 8 children in his thought bubble (4 girls, 4 boys; 1 boy/girl walk to school together, 1 boy on crutches, 1 girl with a ball over her head, 1 girl/1 boy playing basketball, 1 boy/1 girl eating).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sometimes, though rarely, an illustration will exclusively feature male or female figures; when this happens, the figure is more often male than female. For instance, the Grade 4 Khmer text (p. 15) shows four girls playing volleyball and no boys are pictured. The Grade 6 Social Studies text (p. 70) speaks generically of farmers and workers in Cambodia but the two small illustrations feature (four) males exclusively (ploughing, climbing palm tree, pushing cart, checking fabric, walking). The Grade 6 Science text illustrates with a picture of a male slaughtering a pig, the relationship between food producers and consumers.

Further, physicians are usually depicted as male, as in the Grade 4 Social Studies text, p. 86). Women are relegated to the role of nurse, or generic medical assistant (e.g. Grade 4 Khmer, p 20; Grade 4 Science, p. 51; Grade 4 Social Studies, p. 29; Grade 5 Science, p. 37, 53; Gr. 6 Science, p. 42). In the Grade 6 Khmer text (p. 14) where children are pictured dreaming about what they want to do in the future, one girl sees her grown up self as a nurse (also distinguishable by a pillbox hat). In addition, the Grade 6 Khmer text (p. 40) pictures two medical staff, one woman and one man, working together in a health centre (neither appear from their uniforms to be either a doctor or a nurse) and a female health worker is teaching a group of women and children about food groups in Grade 6 Science (p. 42).
A female corollary with males as physicians is teachers who are almost always shown as female in textbook illustrations. While it is true that the majority of primary school teachers are female, it is also true that the MoEYS is ostensibly attempting to address such gender imbalances through its mainstreaming policy. There are numerous other examples of “exclusive portrayal” that, taken individually may appear benign, but taken as a whole provide a clearly gendered picture of male roles/female roles in Cambodia. Table 41 below provides some examples.

**Table 41: Differing portrayal of males and females**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role / activity</th>
<th>Differing portrayal of males and females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family and domestic work</td>
<td>- When a family is portrayed, it is often a nuclear family of four: mother, father, daughter, son. In such instances, mother is more often than father doing domestic work such as cooking; the father is more often shown at rest (watching television, talking with children) or instructing or affirming children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- In no illustration in any of the textbooks are boys serving food or drinks (though one narrative tells of a boy working in a restaurant); in several illustrations, girls are serving drinks to guests in their home, or serving food/drinks in restaurants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- The only adult males portrayed as doing food preparation are a professional chef in a modern kitchen; the husband whose (stupid) wife can’t find a pot in which to cook the eel; and a man forced by a judge to make a pot of soup.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-domestic labour</td>
<td>- No females are ever pictured doing construction work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Males are shown doing hard physical labour (lifting heavy loads, etc.); the most physically strenuous work women are shown doing in any texts is transplanting rice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- In all three Science texts, males are associated with machines – driving them, using them, fixing them. Females are not shown using machines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys rough, girls soft</td>
<td>- In Science texts, males are also associated with accidents and broken bones; females are not (except as physician, in one case).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Females are associated/pictured with flowers, while males are not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports at school</td>
<td>- Girls are never shown playing soccer but boys are often shown playing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- In just two illustrations in all 12 textbooks, girls play basketball while boys are often shown playing this sport.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Very occasionally girls are shown playing volleyball, but as with other sports, with far less frequently than boys are shown playing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role / activity</td>
<td>Differing portrayal of males and females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom behaviour</strong></td>
<td>- In no illustration of a classroom setting are girls shown to be misbehaving; however, in some such illustrations, male students are clearly depicted as misbehaving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political figures</strong></td>
<td>- Photographs of political figures are exclusively male, except in one picture where King Sihanouk and Queen Monique are featured together. - Illustrations about various aspects of the government structure or legal system do make an effort to show equal numbers of males and females (Grade 4 Social Studies chapter about local authority/government structure shows 3 men/3 women sitting at a table (probably depicting a commune council committee).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training, instructing, giving awards</strong></td>
<td>- Men run workshop/community meeting and women attend (e.g. Grade 4 Khmer, p. 26); men hand out awards (Grade 4 Social Studies, p. 2). In one illustration (Grade 6 Khmer, p. 9) a female teacher is handing out presents to children. - As discussed in the first point in this Table, when families are depicted, adult males are almost always the one giving instruction and advice (illustrated with pointing finger).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Distinctive apparel</strong></td>
<td>- Fewer females are pictured wearing spectacles (a total of four times in all texts); men wear glasses in 10 pictures in the texts reviewed. According to RA2, In Cambodia, spectacles are still associated with knowledge/wisdom/learning and they denote social prestige. - Women much more often than men are shown wearing traditional clothes (and doing traditional dance).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not all illustrations give equitable portrayal of males and females even where the numbers of each is exactly equal. Sometimes the inequality is subtle, occurring in depiction of action (or non-action). One example of this is in the Grade 4 Math text (p. 100) where three boys and three girls are shown standing on weight scales. The girls are all standing straight with arms down at their sides, looking passive; the boys are all standing with arms raised or on their hips, suggestive of action and initiative. Another example of “gender biased” illustrations is found in the Grade 4 Khmer text (p. 33). This lesson about politeness and respect for elders contains four separate illustrations. Taken as a whole, they clearly portray males in positions of leadership, prominence, and authority. In the first picture, one boy/one girl walking bow their heads when they pass one grandfather/one grandmother. The grandfather is walking with a cane, leading the grandmother who is bent over and holding a basket. In the second picture,
one boy/one girl *somphiek* (traditional greeting) thei parents (one father/one mother) before leaving the house in the morning. The father, standing in foreground places his hand on son’s head. The mother is seated in background, smaller than the father. The daughter is standing behind the son – so both males are more prominent than both females in this picture. The third picture shows a female teacher facing the class, and one boy/one girl stand in doorway to *somphiek* the teacher before entering the classroom. The fourth picture shows grandparents facing the reader and two students (one boy/one girl) sitting with them on a mat at night. Grandmother is holding a fan; grandfather is pointing something out to the children and instructing them.

A third example of this subtle bias (i.e. while the numbers of males/females may be nearly or exactly equal in a given illustration, their actions belie equality) comes from the Grade 6 Social Studies text (p. 74). The narrative speaks of the levels of courts in the Cambodia judicial system. The two illustration show males as police officers catching criminals – in the first picture, two women have been apprehended and in the second, a male is hand-cuffed and walking between two male police. In a lesson continuing this topic, the diagram of a court scene shows a total of 22 people (the sex is not possible to ascertain for three of them). Males are in the roles of judges, witness, clerk, police, and observers, while females are in the roles of clerk, police, and observers.

In addition, females much more than males seem to be cast (implicitly) in the role of symbols and guardians of national culture and identity. This is most clearly represented by dancing female figures in traditional garb. It is very clearly expressed in an illustration in Grade 6 Social Studies text (p. 117) which is a mural atop the page showing a begging monk with young male acolyte, a male artisan chiselling a statue, a female doing traditional dance
pose, and a male painting a picture of Angkor Wat on an easel. The accompanying text declares that as Cambodia was prosperous and strong in the past, so the next generation must work hard to prosper the country.

Related to this, textbooks contain numerous illustrations of traditional dance and traditional music, especially the Social Studies and Khmer textbooks. Much more often than men, women are depicted doing traditional dance without the presence of males in the picture. When men are shown doing traditional dance, it is always with an equal number of women. Where one sex is distinguished as initiating participation in a dance, it is always a male. Whenever traditional dance is illustrated, it always shows participants wearing traditional clothing. With a single exception where a woman is shaking two small hand gourds (Grade 6 Khmer, p. 94-95), only males are shown playing traditional instruments.

**Official perceptions of gender in textbooks**

Official perceptions of gender in textbooks differed significantly from researcher perspectives. Both MoEYS official at central level, and teachers and school administrators at school/village level observed that in their view, textbooks merely portray reality. There did not seem to be appreciation for the possibility that textbook illustrations and text could shape attitudes and behaviour of the people using those books; or that messages conveyed by the books could unduly favour males (or females). Gender, as a concept, was largely seen to be addressed through explicit coverage of “human rights” and at a theoretical level. “Gender equality” was essentially described as being the responsibility of women, and seen in terms of women assuming occupations traditionally dominated by males.

Head of the MoEYS Gender Working Group explained that the general education curriculum addresses gender beginning in Grade 5 when “they include child rights, women’s
rights, and articles of the Cambodian constitution. The way [teachers] can be successful to promote gender is by understanding CEDAW and international laws [about women’s rights]” (I-P23). She continued:

They include [gender] in the pictures [too].…. For example the picture about breastfeeding is like this -- not only mothers can feed babies milk, but father also can feed the baby by using powdered milk. Fathers can feed children rice, not just mothers have the duty to feed. And for preparing or cleaning the house too, the books teach that both [father and mother] can/should join together. They have like that in the books.

One more thing is that they show in the pictures people who have careers. Women also can work as soldiers or police; it is not only men who can do these kinds of jobs, but women can too. And working as a teacher, it is not only women who can be teachers but men can also; doctors, they both can be too. And engineers! And recently NEP [NGO Education Partnership – a local agency] had one program in Kampot province where they have a poster to show [about gender equality] and the poster needs to be shared to all schools.

When asked if/how the state curricula and textbooks show gender, teachers appeared to be unaware of even the possibility of “gendered” content. They explained that in the textbooks there are pictures of both boys and girls, and of men and women helping each other.

According to a female teacher FGD and a male teacher FGD, the books show “Life as it is, women doing certain things and men doing certain things” (I-P22; I-B1).

It appears that while teachers understand the representative nature of the curricula content, they do not recognise the formative nature of such “messaging”, and the fact that “social institutions like schools also play a significant role in the transmission of dominant ideologies and social identities, and can reinforce existing gender inequalities through curriculum content and classroom practices” (Gorman, 1999, p. 10). This lack of awareness clearly emerges from conversation about how textbooks, narrative and illustrations, might show/talk about differences between males and females, gender, teachers responded as follows in Box 16 below.
Box 16: Sala Phum teacher perceptions of gender in textbooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sala Phum teacher perceptions of gender in textbooks – FGD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vignette 1 (female teachers)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JKR: So in the textbook when it talks about family, does it specify that in the family fathers do this and mothers do that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female teachers</strong>: There are some conversations between father and children as they go somewhere together. And also the books sometimes mention about their occupation too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JKR: Can you give an example?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female teachers</strong>: Father is a teacher, mother a housekeeper or farmer. It says, when in school I call my father “teacher” and at home I call him “father”.... In some conversation [the role play/drama exercise] it says “my father is a farmer and my mother stays home to cook,” something like that too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vignette 2 (female teachers)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female teachers</strong>: The lessons just teach [boys and girls] to love each other as brother and sister, as friends; something like that. In all books in our classes there are lessons like that. In social study book there is a dialogue between Sokha and Sophi about their family, like how many siblings do they have?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JKR: So what is the purpose of that lesson?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female teachers: The lesson teaches students to help parents with house work. And it teaches them how to describe about their family, their parents’ occupations and things like that. In the drama [role play] dad is a doctor and mom is a tailor. Then we ask students to do role play – both boys and girls do the role play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vignette 3 (female teachers)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JKR: Normally in your textbooks it includes pictures. Are there any pictures that shows about what girls do and boys do; or showing what parents do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female teachers</strong>: Yes, there are some.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JKR: Can you give an example?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female teacher 1</strong>: If dad is a doctor then there is doctor picture; and mom as the tailor then there is tailor picture. And the children, brother and sister, they hold hands and go to school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JKR: How about in your textbook, what kinds of pictures are in there?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade 3 female teacher</strong>: In Grade 3 textbook, it shows the son raising animals, daughter cleaning up the house; and father growing vegetable with mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JKR: Any other pictures that you see?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female teachers</strong>: There are pictures in the book for each subject.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JKR: Can you give one more example?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female teachers</strong>: Father climbs the palm tree, which is life in the village.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade 1 female teacher</strong>: In my text book there is a woman sewing. And Sokha [a girl] goes to pick kor fruit and there is a picture for that. There is also a picture of a grandfather going to pagoda, and also army pictures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vignette 4 (male teachers)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JKR: Your textbooks have pictures too, right? Not only words and stories. So what do the pictures show, what do they say about men and women?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Male teacher 1**: “The pictures are the same [same number of women/men]. There are chapters in the lessons, and each chapter has pictures of male working on
Cambodia remains a socially conservative society, especially in relation to matters of public discourse around female sexuality. So it is not surprising that textbooks take a very anatomical or physiological approach to “reproductive health.” This may well help students to be more comfortable with the material, especially when its taught by a teacher of their opposite sex; however, even for primary-school aged children (12-14 years old) not incorporating a “rights” and “relational” component with this topic may actually be a great disservice in a nation where females (in particular) are not well equipped to negotiate sexual activity and are prey to increasingly severe gender-based violence.

Further, the “how” of educating children on reproductive health potentially complicates the situation. On average, male teachers were quite dismissive of potential problems that could arise from male adults teaching about reproductive health to female children (and vice versa); in part this appears to arise from a desire to cast themselves as competent teachers (able to teach anything) and a desire to be regarded as individually (and nationally) modern and progressive. Male teachers did acknowledge that their female students were perhaps a little shy to answer questions about the topic of sex and reproductive health, but said the girls had no problem otherwise engaging with the material. This contrasted with female teacher views that girls were not comfortable engaging with male teachers, and male peers, on personal/body issues like reproductive health (see Box 17, below).
Box 17: Teacher perceptions of student response to uncomfortable topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher perceptions of student response to uncomfortable topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vignette 1 (female teachers)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Female teachers</em>: Girls are more shy than boys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JKR</strong>: What does that look like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Female teachers</em>: When they answer, they are shy. The girls don’t want to answer even if they know the answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JKR</strong>: Does that teacher do anything to help them not to be shy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>One female teacher</em>: I just encourage them that it is ok to answer; now [in contemporary society] other people discuss these thing in public places. And you all have the same/equal right to answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JKR</strong>: Before she starts teaching this information [about sex] to the students, do the students already know a lot about this or does she feel everything is new for the students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Female teachers</em>: They knew some through their community where they live in, and through their family too. And if we teach about violence they already know about this, they all can answer. Some of them live in that situation, their parents fight. Then those students bring this information or example to share with the class.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Vignette 2 (male teachers)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>JKR</strong>: So when they teach those things like biology and physiology, is that hard for them to teach these topics because many people in Cambodia don’t like to talk a lot about such personal things like that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Male teacher 1</em>: Our society is changing. Now they show things like this on TV so it seems normal to hear these topics too. For example when I teach my students about boy’s reproduction I show a picture of men’s reproductive organs to the boys and girls together. The students feel it is normal [mien aram twamadah] and they have no problem to talk about these topics because they see on television and they feel normal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JKR</strong>: And is that ok for you to teach too? Do you feel ok as the teacher to talk about these topics?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Male teacher 2</em>: Yes, I feel normal; and anyway, I can’t change with a female teacher because in primary school there is only one teacher in one class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>JKR</strong>: And is it ok for students to learn? How do student feel when they learn these things?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Male teacher 3</em>: They just laugh when they learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Male teacher 2</em>: Before we teach the students, we also tell them that we must learn this information/subject to get the knowledge, not just to play around about it or to be embarrassed; learning this helps us know about our health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Male teacher 3</em>: When we teach about the male reproduction system (inside the body) this is not hard [uncomfortable to teach] because they don’t see anything in the pictures, just some diagram of internal parts. But in the lesson about reproductive healthcare, they [have illustration of] the whole naked human from young to old – so that is a bit hard to teach.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As with the issue of discipline and corporal punishment, schools/teachers find themselves as vanguards on the high seas of cultural tension: modernity vs. traditionalism, Cambodian vs. other Asian cultures, and so forth. And rural teachers find themselves ill equipped to be in this uncomfortable position of promoting contemporary globalised ideals which they do not understand well, while feeling a strong desire, and being tasked by parents (and society in general) to maintain traditional ideals for themselves, their own children, and the students in their classrooms.

**Chapter Summary**

Cambodia’s chequered political history attests that the country is no stranger to international influence. Globalised educational discourse about human rights, women’s rights, and child rights have been integrated throughout various national social and political development policy and strategy documents. The Cambodian Constitution and many other key documents provide a theoretical framework for protecting and promoting women in particular. However, traditional perspectives about the inferior value and status of women are still more powerful than the relatively recent addition of the notion/s of gender and of gender equality and serve to hinder female participation in many aspects of public life, and to curtail opportunities for individuals to achieve according to their potential. This is evident in all aspects of life, ranging from persistent gender-based violence, poor representation of women in high levels of government, and differential educational participation. In the education sector, traditional views of women are promoted and reinforced by strictly gendered school and classroom interaction as well as by textbook content.

In other words, globalised educational discourse about primary education appears to be having only an incremental effect on promoting transformation/s in gender/ed identities and
relations. There is a relatively high degree of awareness about “correct” answers (termed as: boys and girls are capable of doing the same work). However, neither deep change nor sustained application of the principle of “equality” has occurred. Four examples will suffice to illustrate this point. First, Dimension 4 (“gender”) is the only one of the six dimensions that does not have an independent guidebook developed for it. Secondly there is clearly a gap between awareness and incorporation of the notion of gender equality. There is much greater theoretical appreciation than actual implementation of gender equity (among students as well as teachers/administrators). As one teacher explained: “Yes both [boys and girls] have rights! If boys can do it, girls can do it too! But for real activity, this is not the way. [In real life] boys can climb trees but girls cannot. Girls are weak.” Third, strong male/female stereotyping persists in schools: in textbooks, in how teachers regard and interact with children, in how children interact on the playground. And fourth, there has not been a visible change in the preferential valuing of males over females as perhaps best exemplified in the fact that very few women participate in the public political sphere, and domestic violence (domestic sphere) is socially accepted and condoned.
CHAPTER NINE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS

The chapter begins by summarising contributions of this research to a key debate in the field of comparative education (world culture theory), as well as theory on globalisation and education, gender and education, and postcolonial theorising about education. It takes a brief theoretical look at the process of uptake, or internalisation, of international ideals and values in post-conflict nations and then speculates on various motives for policy transfer as it has happened in the education sector in Cambodia. Next, the chapter identifies and describes five significant challenges to international norm diffusion generally, and educational implementation in Cambodia specifically. These include historical conflict-related factors, socio-cultural traits, epistemological inclinations, pedagogical features, and (political) systems challenges. All of these features must be factored into processes of policy borrowing and localisation in order to produce an optimal outcome.

Then the paper highlights five areas which policy and practice must take more seriously in the interest of more effective, appropriate, and equitable basic education for Cambodian children. Those are: culturally defined preferences, inequitable gender relations, philosophical and pedagogical challenges, and political/systems issues. Taking a social justice approach to education demands and enables key stakeholders (i.e. international, national, and local actors) to more transparently negotiate the terrain between global orthodoxies and local realities in the service of devising quality formal education. Unless effort is made to do so, mass public education of questionable quality and limited value will likely continue to characterise LICs. The chapter concludes with suggestions for research that will further extend understanding of the complex processes of norm diffusion and educational policy transfer in a globalised world.
Summary of Findings

This research aimed to answer two main questions. The first question was: “How do local communities in rural Cambodia negotiate globalised educational discourses in primary education (exemplified by CFS)? What is the grassroots response to international models and philosophies of education?” Research findings reveal that policy makers and classroom implementers are active in negotiation of CFS, and numerous other global educational orthodoxies, though implementation may not bear much resemblance to the original intent. Global ideals are mediated through multiple layers of current reality and past history, and thus they land more or less comfortably. While reception appears to be enthusiastic, closer scrutiny shows that contestation and resistance characterise response, especially at local level. Teachers deploy, incorporate, adapt, contest, resist, and even reject significant elements of the CFS framework. Central authorities also intentionally ignore key aspects of CFS philosophy, for instance, those which contradict the rigidly hierarchical nature of Cambodian social organisation. These responses arise not simply because teachers lack training or materials, or official lack understanding, but more fundamentally because of differences in deeply held cultural values and beliefs.

The second question addressed by this inquiry was: “To what extent does globalised educational discourse about primary education promote transformation/s in gender identities and relations?” In summary this research strongly suggests that while international gender norms have been solidly institutionalised in multiple policy documents as well as in rhetoric about equality espoused by central authorities and local educators alike, these norms have not been internalised. Part of the barrier to internalisation relates to linguistic constraints; but a larger onus must be placed on prevailing attitudes about female inferiority. Thus, while some
effort is made to depict equality in textbook content in particular, as well as demonstrated by
the emphasis on getting girls to school, globalised educational discourse has not actually done
much to alter attitudes or actual behaviour, much less affected transformation of gender
identities and relations.

There are clear connections between my theoretical framing and the research findings.
As explained in Chapter Three, this research operationalised the major theoretical and
methodological impulses of critical theory, critical feminism, and postcolonialism through
employment of a critical educational ethnography. These three distinct traditions share core
values. All regard social reality as variations on the theme of oppression/resistance, all require
actively accounting for structural forces and not simply individual agency, all seek to change
and not just explain or describe social phenomenon, and all three regard empowerment and
social justice as the purpose of inquiry. These three frames also have distinct things to say
about how to conduct research. That is, they value and employ particular forms of inquiry,
processes which were intentionally corporated into implementation of this doctoral research.
Specifically, these frames seek to involve multiple different stakeholders (marginalised and
privileged alike), attempt reciprocity with respondents, all recognise that research is as much a
subjective as objective venture, and all aim to facilitate genuine interaction with respondents
through employment of creative activities and processes.

This research, then, clearly demonstrates that subaltern voices have a different message
than that heard from privileged voices in formal positions of power and authority. Secondly,
this particular theoretical frame enabled definition of the contours of systemic oppression as
well as identification of resistance at both national level and local level. Third, these frames
enabled recognition and definition of specific dimensions of gendered power dynamics, not
only political power dynamics. And, finally, this particular theoretical montage enabled identification of ways that educational discourses assumed to be “universal” are not necessarily so, and assumptions in this direction can be harmful.

**Contribution to Theory**

This research makes an important contribution to a critical issue in the field of comparative education (the so-called “world culture debate”) “by illustrating that the perceived worldwide convergence of educational systems plays out very differently on the ground” and showing that though “educational convergence may indeed be visible at the level of ‘policy talk,’ yet it starkly metamorphosizes as the global reforms [CFS] or the global norms [gender equity] hit the ground locally” (I. Silova, personal communication, November 14, 2012). In other words, this paper offers a viable critique of the notions promoted by neo-institutional and world culture theories by demonstrating a strong case of local hybridisation of global reforms.

This research also contributes to three distinct theoretical fields: globalisation and education, gender and education, and postcolonial theorising about education. For LICs, the global agenda of “education for development” is a key influence on conceptualisation of national education priorities and policies, not least because it comes wrapped in financial incentives. However, donor aid behind the agenda is not a homogenous package, but rather it is comprised of “complex and messy” (Colclough, King & McGrath, 2010, p. 451) bi/multilateral rivalries and conflicting priorities which may dilute or distort particular elements. And the international [Western] donor agenda must be recognised as just one of many influences. It is critical to not underestimate the strength of local context and to not overestimate the extent of Western hegemony. Recipient LICs at national level exercise considerable agency in responding to the policies on offer, and local practitioners do too
While a great deal of attention has been paid to national-level policy transfer, much less research has been aimed at understanding local level implementation of such policies. This vertical case study about Cambodia helps fill that knowledge gap as it provides a nuanced description of grassroots implementation of global educational orthodoxies. This research also clearly demonstrates that the links between global and local are mediated through multiple layers of indigenous and foreign influences, formal and informal variables as depicted in Figure 4 below. And it underscores the importance of giving “culture” real attention, as failure to do so can prevent rhetoric from becoming reality and policy from moving into actual practice, as exemplified by the contentious issue of gender equality in education and other social sectors.

**Figure 4: Summary – Mediation of global norms.**

A nation’s history, particular geo-political context, economic status, tolerance for corruption, and regional positioning all shape the process of policy/reform uptake and norm diffusion. So too, cultural antecedents and resulting (dynamic) worldview will affect how (a particular) global discourse is received, understood, and employed (in a particular location).
Taking a postcolonial perspective enabled the research to elicit and to hear what classroom practitioners believe and think about international norms and ideas; and subsequently, to apportion responsibility for poor quality and systems issues to national, as well as international actors, rather than only pointing a finger at the traditionally blamed imperial powers. In keeping with post-colonial sensitivities, this research did not attempt or pretend to to represent Cambodians. Rather, it sought to generate dialogue that will be taken up and continued by local practitioners and policy makers, and foreign organisations involved in supporting the education sector.

**Theory 1 – Globalisation and education**

Findings from this research suggest that on the surface, though it may appear that educational policies and practices are globally (or regionally) homogenous, in fact hybrid forms of education occurs at local (village, school) level. The hybrid result is not necessarily beneficial for educators or learners, though it can be. Blended educational practices occur for different reasons. One of the major reasons is because of limited appreciation by both the promoters and recipients of global educational orthodoxies for fundamental values orientation of those orthodoxies and how the resulting values clash affects delivery of quality education. A second reason is limited understanding at national level of the complexities of implementation and subsequent poor communication down the education chain, for which Wells’ (2005) game of telephone is an apt metaphor. She concludes that only the one who initiates the game really understands what was intended, though every player creates their own understanding.

This research also demonstrates that it is too simplistic to say that LICs are coerced into accepting policies from donors and the international aid community. Rather, national-level
actors demonstrate significant agency in implementation, often using ostensible adoption of international policy norms to achieve their own ends. At local (school) level, agency is demonstrated by numerous examples of adaptation, contestation, and resistance. In post-conflict settings, appealing to the popular discourses of poverty and of low capacity to explain deviations from international standards and guidelines is inaccurate, insufficiently nuanced, and limits the quest to improve the quality of education in LICs.

**Theory 2 – Gender and education**

Rhetoric supportive of gender equality, though deeply engrained in Cambodia’s national development plans and policy documents of numerous Ministries, has not had a significant influence on attitudes about gender equality, much less initiated behavioural change. One reason for limited influence is that gender has been effectively side-lined by gender mainstreaming rhetoric rather than effectively incorporated into Ministry activities. A second and related reason is that deeply entrenched beliefs about male superiority and behavioural double-standards enforced by appeal to tradition lie at the root of discrimination against girls and women. Such attitudes are not being challenged; rather, the locus of responsibility is assigned to girls and women to surmount the significant socio-cultural obstacles that stand in the way of schooling, equal pay for equal work, employment opportunities, involvement in government, and so forth. This is the case in many LICs, and not a uniquely Cambodian issue. As with much of the pedagogical practice espoused by the international community, this research postulates that it is essentially a clash of deeply held values and beliefs, which are fundamentally aspects of worldview, that is at the heart of resistance to the uptake of international norms about human rights and equality. In other words, the issue (or “problem”) is a philosophical one, rather than a technical one. Figure 5
below illustrates the reasons that educators in Cambodia adapt, contest, and resist international gender norms.

**Figure 5: Rationale for response/s to foreign gender norms**

Local conceptualisation of gender has immediate implications for education. The strong emphasis on the right of girls to attend school, now widely considered acceptable at least for primary grades, is necessary but certainly not sufficient for creating an environment of genuine gender equality. In fact, the Cambodia case shows that this can actually obfuscate the equally important issues of rights within education (e.g. formal positions of authority in the Ministry, equitable representation in textbooks) and through education (e.g. access to employment, political power, property ownership). Transforming gendered identities and relations within educational institutions and society at large will require sustained and concerted effort and effort must be made on both fronts simultaneously.
Theory 3 – Postcolonial frameworks

A postcolonial perspective proved to be a useful frame for conceptualising formal education because it puts issues of power and voice at its centre. By so doing, postcolonial theorising facilitates understanding of connection/s between local actor/s and larger political, economic, and social processes which circumscribe possible interaction and outcome. This research identified and described numerous connections, conditions, and factors—global, international, regional, and domestic—through which educational policy is mediated in Cambodia, and which therefore have a direct impact on implementation. Such detailed description has not previously been done for Cambodia, and thus contributes directly to contextual appreciation by local educators, but also to the understanding of the complexity of educational policy lending and borrowing in a wider sense.

This research also highlighted the “unconsciously ethnocentric” dominant discourses of education originating in the international aid apparatus and provided evidence to suggest that more thoughtful caution should precede the assigning of the moniker “universal” to various aspects of the educational enterprise. International educational norms may not transfer well, or may simply be inappropriate, because they are based on values and beliefs that deviate from or conflict with the worldview held by those on the receiving end.

At the same time, postcolonial theorising demonstrates that the definition of colonial can be extended to include national elites too, not just foreigners. This research demonstrated that colonising impulses indeed remain strong in a globalised world. While exogenous to indigenous is perhaps the most easy to see, suppression of democratic participation is also evident in the Cambodian education system as the central Ministry’s top-down system discourages feedback even as it operates in the guise of “deconcentration.”
This research project attempted “to understand the local in nuanced and polyvocal terms that highlight human agency, subjective perceptions, different knowledges” (Simon, 2006, p. 18). It did so by focusing on capturing the voices and ideas of a heretofore marginalised group – teachers, students, and parents/caregivers at the school level. Agency at the grassroots level was observable through negotiation of various educational policies and practices dictated by the national level MoEYS. At every turn, teachers deploy, incorporate, adapt, contest, and resist international education orthodoxies. Some resistance arises when individuals prioritise local values and beliefs; some contestation appears to be a ‘push back’ against authorities higher in the MoEYS chain of command; and at some points “failure to implement” seems to be simply a practical, perhaps reflexive, response to limited resources.

**Uptake of International Norms: CFS as Case in Point**

Though significant progress has been made toward uptake of CFS since the pilot began in 2001, a deep understanding and informed practice of CFS have not permeated formal education in Cambodia. The same can be said of numerous other educational reform initiatives. More resources/materials, deeper understanding, and even more freedom for educational practitioners to be responsive to local context are necessary, but will not necessarily guarantee the sea-change necessary to make formal education truly child friendly in Cambodian terms.

**Conditions required for deep internalisation**

Allden’s (2009) exploration of how international gender norms are diffused by international actors and received by recipient states is instructive when applied to Cambodian negotiation of Child Friendly Schools and the multiple strands of international educational
norms embedded therein. Using Allden’s (borrowed) distinction between norm institutionalisation (embedded in political rhetoric and increasingly into legislation and policy) and norm internalisation (agreement and overall compliance at all levels of society, grassroots to elite), it is possible to consider CFS as a norm that has been institutionalised, though not yet internalised. Further, Allden differentiates between socialisation and localisation of norms. “Socialisation” refers to situations where receiving actors have accepted the norm’s validity and altered their beliefs and attitudes in favour of the new idea (2009, p. 7). “Localisation” is when the international norm is altered to fit the local context, modified to fit into the local hierarchy of norms. Allden postulates that, “International norms are more likely to be implemented and complied within the domestic context if they resonate with existing collective understandings embedded in domestic institutions and political culture” (Risse, Ropp & Sikkink, 1999, p. 271 cited in Allden, 2009, p. 25).

In her exploration of the relationship between domestic change and international norms, Allden (2009) identifies several obstacles that may hinder adoption, and several conditions which must be present to ensure internalisation. Obstacles to deep internalisation may include social institutions, social norms, traditions, and discriminating behaviour (p. 31). Another major hindrance is “cultural mis-match” (p. 34). As my research findings demonstrate, all of these obstacles are present in abundance in the rural Cambodian context.

An obvious set of necessary conditions for internalisation are adequate time and resources (p. 24). Awareness and understanding are also essential (p. 26), as is an adequate and conducive institutional framework (p. 26), commitment and political will (p. 45). It is helpful to have “local champions” (p. 24) who can make the concepts “interesting and understandable for the local people” (p. 245). Locally initiated adaptation of foreign ideas and
consciousness-raising about the adapted variet/ies are also fundamental (p. 29). Awareness-raising and training activities must be culturally sensitive (p. 255) and cognisant of the possibility that foreign norms may actually conflict with local values and socio-cultural norms.

Finally, Allden demonstrates appreciation for the complexity of sustainable habitation of foreign norms by applying the notion of “capability to function” as means for facilitating “a more nuanced understanding of the mechanisms at play for successful norm diffusion” (2009, p. 15). In other words, in addition to an adequate policy environment and rhetorical capacity, people also require sufficient freedom and agency, as well as individual and social ability, for genuine engagement with external norms and demands. “Capabilities” is not simply a theoretical notion, but has a practical aspect (e.g. one must be adequately nourished to function well; a teacher must have sufficient appreciation of a concept in order to apply it) (p. 31).

Instances of localisation

This research in Kampong Cham suggests that internalisation (socialisation) of CFS has not occurred though some key aspects of CFS have been localised (that is, Khmerised) at points of implementation. That is, more than altering local attitudes and beliefs, CFS has been altered by practitioners to fit their understanding and context. For instance, the fact that most classrooms, regardless of grade, display many identical pictures on their walls could be interpreted as a reflection of the strong need for reproduction and harmonisation among peers. The frequent use of verbal shaming and threats of violence, rather than actual corporal punishment could be viewed as a culturally sensitive and effective rendition of classroom discipline. In many instances, School Support Committees appear to have been amalgamated with a traditional committee responsible for raising financial and material support for schools, and the “new” aims of SSC (such as engagement with planning and representing parents’
interests) are not a priority. In the case of Sala Phum, SSC members are formal community leaders and gatekeepers, and several did not have children of their own attending the school.

**Summary of negotiated responses**

As described in Chapter 7 local negotiation of imposed international discourse about education (in the form of CFS) takes five main forms in Cambodia. CFS – its philosophic basis, goals and aims, strategies, structures, processes, and techniques (Phillips & Ochs, 2004, p. 779) – is deployed, incorporated, adapted, contested, and resisted. Various and multiple elements of global education-for-development discourse are embedded in each of the six dimensions of CFS. For example, the first Dimension of Cambodia’s CFS policy, “All children have access to school” is predicated on the “universal” notion/s of human rights, child rights, gender equality, and inclusive education. However, as demonstrated in Chapter 6, “universal” perspectives on child rights are at odds with Khmer views and practices. At a practical level teachers contest the policy imperative of including all children in school by intentionally neglecting to recognise the existence of physically and mentally disabled children in their community as well as making limited effort to accommodate “disruptive” or “unruly” students or facilitate re-entry when those students drop out. Their rationale is that quality is adversely impacted if everyone can attend school. Chapter 5 contains multiple additional examples of the result of a Khmer worldview meeting formal education as prescribed by the international community: at many different turns, the cognitive dissonance resulting from conflicting views and values motivates particular responses to these global orthodoxies. Table 42 below provides a summary look at international policy and global discourse as reflected in terms of the six CFS dimensions, and then gives brief example/s of local negotiation. In
addition, a much more detailed overview of observations of practice against each of the six Dimensions is included in Appendix 10.

In addition to varying responses to global discourse embedded within the six CFS Dimensions, teachers and families also tacitly disagree with the RGC’s dominant discourse of education’s major goal being development of human capital for national (economic) development. That this is a chief aim is amply evidenced in policy documents, the Prime Minister’s public speeches, emphasis in the curriculum on life skills and a recent shift in language from life skills to economic strengthening, as well as in current efforts to develop a vocational skills stream in upper secondary school. Local contestation of this conceptualisation is evidenced in parents’ articulation of their desired aims for schooling as moral education for a better society, and calls for instruction in practical, locally relevant skills (e.g. agriculture) that will improve their children’s quality of life. General lack of parental engagement with schools is an example of tacit contestation as well.

**Table 42: Summary of international discourse and local negotiation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International discourse</th>
<th>(Reflected in) CFS Policy dimension</th>
<th>Local Negotiation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>− Human rights, child rights.</td>
<td>All children have access to school.</td>
<td>− <strong>Contestation</strong> (e.g. blind to disability, reducing gender equality to girls in school).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Inclusive education.</td>
<td></td>
<td>− <strong>Resistance</strong> (e.g. truncated MLE for indigenous ethnic minorities).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Gender equality.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Child rights.</td>
<td>Effective teaching and learning.</td>
<td>− <strong>Deployment</strong> (e.g. teachers perform CFS when required).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Individual agency.</td>
<td></td>
<td>− <strong>Incorporation</strong> (e.g. group work as form, work with slow learners).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Student-centred learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td>− <strong>Adaptation</strong> (e.g. modified forms of SCL, monitoring by DMT).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Inquiry-based learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td>− <strong>Contestation</strong> (e.g. continued practice and views of corporal punishment, diversity, teaching methods).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Experiential learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td>− <strong>Resistance</strong> (e.g. to democratic participation).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Constructivist epistemology.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Democratic classrooms.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>− Lifelong learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>International discourse</strong></td>
<td><strong>(Reflected in) CFS Policy dimension</strong></td>
<td><strong>Local Negotiation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Child rights.</td>
<td>Child health, safety, protection.</td>
<td>- <strong>Incorporation</strong> (e.g. construction of toilets; reference to urban traffic laws).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Contestation</strong> (e.g. ignoring protection issues).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Human rights.</td>
<td>Gender sensitivity, responsiveness.</td>
<td>- <strong>Incorporation</strong> (e.g. getting girls to school).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gender equality.</td>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Contestation</strong> (e.g. failure to recognise lack of female authority figures in MOEYS; locating onus for equality with girls)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Individual agency.</td>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Resistance</strong> (e.g. tacit acceptance of notion of male superiority).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Democratisation of educational enterprise.</td>
<td>Participation by children, families, communities.</td>
<td>- <strong>Adaptation</strong> (e.g. School Support Committee at local level).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Individual choice.</td>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Resistance</strong> (e.g. central and local resistance to democratic participation, local responsiveness).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Public/private partnerships.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- From RGC-level decentralisation &amp; deconcentration</td>
<td>Support from MoEYS.</td>
<td>- <strong>Deployment</strong> (e.g. policy and guidelines dictated by centre, acknowledged by schools).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Minimal but essential government financial &amp; technical support.</td>
<td></td>
<td>- <strong>Resistance</strong> (i.e. no democratic participation, very limited local responsiveness).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Decentralisation &amp; deconcentration.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Explaining Cambodian Responses to CFS**

While certainly not claiming it as an indigenous initiative, officials in various departments of the MoEYS do actively express ownership for the decision to adopt CFS as a national policy and have a clearly articulated appreciation for the possibility that it may improve educational quality. An indicator of support is that they expend considerable energy to produce documents, training workshops, and to get the word out to practitioners at the implementation level. Such support must be understood in the context of increasingly vociferous government rhetoric from the highest levels about the evils of foreign influence.
(which also characterised the ascendance of previous regimes) (Brinkley, 2011; Edwards, 2008). Thus it is not strictly accurate to say that the global aid apparatus has coerced the Cambodian government to assume this particular policy for primary education, though clearly, regional peer pressure and financial inducement from the global aid apparatus were a compelling force in Cambodia’s adoption of Child Friendly Schools (as is also the case with various other policy reforms and RGC priorities).

This research suggests that in primary education, as Howes & Ford (2011) have noted for higher education, MoEYS and related RGC authorities are “active agents in negotiating the globalisation game to their own advantage and the advantage of their institution, at least within the limits of what is contextually possible” (p. 163). Financial support that comes attached to adoption of global campaigns such as the EFA is one obvious advantage:

The EFA National Plan 2003–2015 is a product of the Royal Government of Cambodia responding to agreements and commitments at a global level. Adopting the EFA framework generates a strong guarantee that global donor support for the achievement of these goals will be forthcoming. (McCormick, 2012, p. 39)

A slightly more cynical view is that the money which inevitably accompanies transfer of international policy is a major incentive because it allows the current system of corruption to continue; and allows RGC to channel its own monies to its priority projects such as the military and the Ministry of Commerce, rather than spending it on social services like education.

A non-Western value, that of “face,” is another perceived benefit (i.e. others are doing it, we do not want to get left behind), regionally as well as internationally. Signing on to international conventions and campaigns enhances national security, as well as promotes international acceptance. This sense of belonging may be a very important aim for a post-conflict society. It also serves to enhance domestic political support as politicians can point to
schools and educational reform efforts as an investment in their nation’s well-being. On both
counts – domestic and international – the power of the discourse may in fact be much more
important than the actual implementation (Howes & Ford, 2011). Curiously, while strongly
desiring to be an active member of the international community, many Cambodians also want
to distinguish themselves from others as an indicator of Cambodian superiority (Kasumi,
2006). As an example of this, several MoEYS official were quick, and proud, to point out that
Cambodia’s CFS Dimensions differed slightly from other nations in the region.

Third, the visibility of education infrastructure which accompanies policy adoption is
doubtlessly a powerful incentive for Cambodian officials, as the role of gifts is vital in
cultivating the image of good governance: “the practice of political patronage…is packaged as
a merit-worthy, selfless and personal display of material support [but] hovering above it all is
the menacing possibility of its disappearance should the recipient not continue their political
support” (Edwards, 2008, p. 22). Fourth, modernisation is a strong and attractive theme in
Cambodia, easily understood (though on their own terms) by impoverished rural rice farmers
and wealthy urban business tycoons alike:

- “Why do we take the Child Friendly idea? Because we compared ourselves in
  the region and we see that others are using it and we want to have it too.
  Cambodia wants to develop; Cambodia wants to follow the purpose of CFS.”
  (I-P40, MoEYS Vice Director of Department, male)
- “Cambodia doesn’t want to miss out.” (I-P35, Expatriate education advisor,
  male)
- “Yes, CFS is good idea for Cambodia. It really works – because their
  countries [source of CFS] are modern and developed, that is why they spread
  [CFS] out to our country. If the idea of CFS doesn’t work well for them, they
  will not share the idea to our school or country too!” (I-P57, male teacher at
  Sala Phum)

Fifth, and related to modernisation as a motive, in many LICs “foreign” and especially
“Western” is equated with superior quality; so it is possible that RGC education officials
intentionally seek out foreign policies and strategies because they believe them to be *sine qua non* for good education. There exists a curious paradox that while in the education sector, “foreign,” and especially the English and Western sort of foreign, is associated with superior quality (witnessed by the names of the schools designed to attract teaching English or other languages, etc.), the Prime Minister tends to decry too much foreign influence as bad for Cambodia.

A sixth possible motive is that education policy makers have made logical, rational, objective, informed decisions about policies and models as being superior to Cambodia’s current system and adopted them because the foreign model is regarded as superior. However, conversation with MoEYS officials provided little evidence for this as a genuine possibility in the Cambodia context. And finally, another possibility for which some evidence is available, is that policy transfer is not so much a rational, thoughtfully mediated process as much as it is a fortuitous combination of personal interest (“pure dumb luck”) and good timing. One example will suffice – a ranking MOEYS official explained that the new move toward offering a vocational track to high school students resulted from a visit she’d recently made to Australia at that government’s behest. She said, “I liked their vocational training; so I came back and we are doing it here.” Which begs the question, what if this official had been invited to Japan? Or Lithuania?

Whatever the actual motivation, or combination of motives, the stage where central authorities and policy makers perform, is very far from the locations where policy is turned into a daily activity. There are many cultural, attitudinal, and practical reasons for the mismatch between policy and practice. The gap is recognised and lamented by central authorities who blame their subordinates, teachers and School Directors, for weak implementation: “We
produce books and guidelines, so many papers – and we provide training and books; we teach to the implementers, but the activity they do is not the same as on paper!” (I-A8, MoEYS Department Director). The dominant solution proposed by people at all levels in the system is “more training for teachers, awareness-raising, and radio and television campaigns to inform them” (I-A8). Yet when pushed, MoEYS officials at central level often indicate that they believe the levels of awareness are sufficiently high, but that teachers are “lazy to do.” At their end, teachers express that they feel ill-equipped to implement policies they do not understand well, and have been insufficiently trained to do. Moreover, teachers state that they are demoralised by low salaries, lack of support from the Cluster, and lack of recognition from MoEYS for their hard work under difficult circumstances; lack of compliance could thus be understood as a form of passive-aggressive resistance against national Ministry demands.

**Five Key Contextual Challenges**

The capability and desire of different actors to understand and implement CFS is affected by several major challenges. These include historical factors (change and trauma), socio-cultural factors, epistemological considerations (see Figure 3 for additional details), philosophical and pedagogical factors, and systems issues. Such challenges confront reception and diffusion of any international norms in Cambodia, though the actual response or outworking also varies somewhat depending upon the level (national, provincial, village, etc.) at which it occurs. These challenges must be carefully considered and intentionally addressed by any initiatives aimed at improving the quality of education in Cambodia. So far, they have been largely neglected.
**Historical factors: change and trauma**

As outlined at length in other studies, the Cambodian political situation has had major influence on the national education system. In summary, in the past six decades (1950-present) Cambodia has been subjected to varied political influences under seven official forms of government. Each political system has used the education system to produce its ideological aims; and due to the nature of geo-political realities, several different languages have been part of the mix. And during the past two decades of relative peace, a plethora of Western aid themes have targeted Cambodia (e.g. human rights, gender, AIDS, good governance, child rights, etc.). So on a very practical level, MoEYS personnel have seen and experienced a great deal of major professional, as well as personal, change; this may affect their enthusiasm for making yet another shift in attitude or in practice.

- “After Pol Pot? That was in 1979. Then I came back to the western part of Phnom Penh. And my town is destroyed. So I have to stay on the side of the road. And I had to study politics in this school – in the Institute of Foreign Languages. It was political school [under Vietnam]. I started to study in this school around July 1979; I started politic school. And this is what we call primary level of politics. This is the central level, but it is primary level of politic. Ha ha ha!” (I-P42, male educator at RUPP)

- “After that I went to Russia (or Soviet we called at the time) to study advanced chemistry (but not leading to a degree) for two years from 1988-1989. We studied in Russian language. Not easy! I have nearly forgotten that language now.” (I-P43, male educator at RUPP).

In addition to navigating such major political and social changes, as detailed in Chapter 5 many Cambodians also suffer from trauma, which directly affects capacity to relate to others, to manage oneself, and of course, to learn. There has been individual and collective trauma resulting from protracted was and especially the horrifically destructive Khmer Rouge regime of 1975-1979; there is also the on-going trauma of chronic low-grade violence which hampers ability to trust others, to plan for the long-term, and to believe that positive change is possible.
Recently, Stammel et al (2012) conducted research which concludes that prolonged grief disorder (PGD – an extended maladaptive reaction to the loss of significant other/s) is prevalent in a substantial portion of the population and is related to other psychiatric disorders, even three decades after the end of the Khmer Rouge regime. Though it is difficult to quantify the impact of various types of trauma on Cambodia’s population, still the phenomenon must be considered and accounted for when designing learning systems.

**Cultural traits and conflicting values**

Cambodians are enthusiastic about education and go to great lengths, and expense, to get and keep their children in school. However, several cultural features appear to limit both the quality of the education offered and the ability of children to engage with that educational opportunity in meaningful, creative ways. That is to say, such factors apply both to teachers’ ability and comfort with constructing particular learning environments, as well as students’ ability to learn by engaging with CFS principles. For example, respect for elders and superiors may have the deleterious affect of inhibiting students from asking questions of their teachers, and likewise may hinder teachers’ willingness to question central authority or to even modify lessons to the local context.

Another example of values conflict relates to gender, as discussed at length in Chapters Five and Eight. Socially prescribed views on gender—such as belief in the superiority of males and inferiority of females, preferential treatment of males, divergent expectations for male and female morality, and condoning of gender-based violence – may hinder opportunity for girls to access formal education, negatively impact the quality of that schooling, and restrict the possible benefits of that educational attainment.
Epistemological inclinations

It would seem a critical contribution to the formal and non-formal educational enterprise in Cambodia for Khmer academics and educators to commence public and transparent dialogue around the fundamental question of what are the contours of a Khmer epistemology; and how that implicitly influences educational philosophy and pedagogical practice, as well as how it might be harnessed to better effect. Currently, many of the educational philosophies and practices in circulation in Cambodia are those that have been introduced by international organisations and there is minimal Khmer voice in dialogue at this fundamental level.

As mentioned elsewhere, the Child Friendly Schools concept is based on four key tenants: a constructivist view of education, child rights and child participation, and cooperative learning principles. The constructivist view of education is based on the work of Piaget who argued that people learn by assimilation (incorporating new experience into an already existing framework without changing that framework) and accommodation (failure leads to learning; requires change of framework). Constructivist epistemology, then, seems to conflict with the dominant Khmer/traditional understanding of formal education as a passive, collective, additive event, rather than an activity by individual learners. In this view, the onus for educating (passing information) is on the teacher and seen to (properly) consist of transmitting facts. While this is a significant challenge, it is not an insurmountable obstacle. However, it requires recognition that:

Unlike the activities of other Dimensions, improving the interaction between teachers and students cannot fundamentally be managed from the outside; changed by supplying resources or materials. For teaching to become ‘child-friendly’ requires creating appropriate ways of helping teachers i) see the value in challenging the substance of their own ideas, beliefs and behaviours with respect to children’s learning, ii) to recognise their ability to affect that learning, and iii) to work through the process of acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to do both of these – and apply the results into their practice. (Bernard, 2008, p. 31)
Reyes’s (2009) study on informal learning underscores the mis-match between the way Cambodian children construct their informal knowledge (of math and science) and their formal school experience. She concludes that it is possible, and perhaps desirable, to employ a constructivist educational model in Cambodia, but that it will require fundamental changes in the curriculum (to make it more locally relevant and responsive) and in teaching practice.

**Philosophical and pedagogical features**

Prevailing attitudes toward teaching, learning, and knowledge in Cambodia are built on a didactic model of knowledge transmission, value factual knowledge and rote learning, disparage questioning of authority, and assign teachers a high degree of respect on the basis of their position rather than (and regardless of) particular skills or knowledge (Duthilleul, 2005; Knibbs & Price, 2009; O’Leary & Nee, 2001). Furthermore, Khmer culture values collective and proven wisdom rather than individual new ideas, replication rather than originality, so it follows that the dominant Khmer concept of a good student is one who learns (and repeats) the knowledge already acquired by his or her teacher (Ayers, 2003; Chandler, 1996).

Pearson shows how pedagogy can successfully combine Cambodian and Western traits. Using a model of facilitating dialogue among development stakeholders called the “World Café” model Pearson (2011) explains that:

> the process is facilitated more closely than it might be elsewhere, and it always leads to a formal output. By doing this, the [learning] facilitators are creatively bridging the gap between the model in its purest form and Cambodian expectations that a good process always results in something concrete at the end. (p. 133)

In considering possible pedagogical bridges, it is helpful to recognise that Cambodia still operates in many respects as an oral culture, illustrated by the research team’s observation about recurrent “call and response” phenomenon. Ong (1982) notes that oral and literate
societies differ fundamentally in the way they generate, manage, and transmit information and knowledge. The prioritisation of sound (oral cultures) or vision (literate cultures) determines not just how communication occurs, but how the very world is conceptualised. Oral societies are “usually highly immediate, personal, and relational” and spoken words are very powerful (Hiebert, 2008, p. 24). This differs dramatically from literate societies where physical proximity is less necessary and less important, and where power rests more in the printed than uttered word. In literate societies, argumentation runs in linear and rational manner but in oral societies it is less direct and more relationally-oriented. In the former, people can be very detached from time and space (abstract); conversely, oral cultures are more directly linked to local context (concrete). Though gradually changing, Cambodia still functions largely as an oral society and such an orientation has a direct bearing on both conceptualisation and implementation of education.

**Political (systems) variables**

...education remains a political symbol of modernisation that largely masks an underlying story of stagnating quality. As a result, while a record number of Cambodians continue to participate in compulsory education, most indications suggest a poor return on education investment alone in terms of employment and social mobility. Similarly skills provided often have limited relevance politically and civically due to a lack of critical thinking and participatory learning. (UNESCO/IIEP, 2011, p. 32)

Challenges inherent in the current system of education are perhaps the most well-documented of barriers. Foremost among these is centralised authority (Ayers, 2000; Chandler, 1993; UNESCO/IIEP, 2011) as a highly centralised system and prescriptive programming are antithetical to the principles of local contextualisation and stakeholder-driven development which are central to the CFS concept (Bredenberg, 2008). Further, a centrally prescribed budget and standardised monitoring checklists for achievement conflict with the
notion of local focus and responsiveness that is inherent within the CFS approach (Courtney, 2008). And wide-scale application of a holistic, principles-based concept (like CFS) across a resource-strapped nation like Cambodia is likely to result in a “minimalist” approach rather than “maximal learning.” It is also unlikely to facilitate development of cross-cutting skills such as critical and creative thinking which CFS aims to foster (Bredenberg & Heeyit, 2004).

Because of the predominant patronage system in which relationships are of greater consideration than technical qualifications as rationale for employment, senior MoEYS leadership may not have technical training, skills, or capacity to fully understand the Child Friendly Schools concept, much less devise effective ways for “rolling it out.” And it may be difficult for people without background or training in educational philosophy to engage in analysis of policies proffered by foreign agents. Further, to date, there has been no systematic national in-service training about CFS, though there have been numerous “cascade training events” (Bernard, 2008) and innumerable ad hoc trainings. Thus, it should be no surprise that teachers in the system reflect more strongly the era in which they studied/received pedagogical training, more than they reflect contemporary educational reforms and philosophies. And given the patronage system, people given positions of authority are not likely to be innovative if this can be construed as challenging their superiors.

When asked how various reforms and related messages are conveyed from the central to implementation level, the (male) Director of the Primary Education department explained: “We have the good mechanism set up at national level – the problem is the teachers in the classroom!” The MoEYS employs 60 core trainers at national level (reportedly both male and female, though details were unavailable) to train on the provincial level; and then the DTMT is designated as the primary sub-national mechanism for ensuring that schools (teachers and
administrators) comply with central policy dictates. Rather than being a constructive champion and purveyor of CFS good practices, the DTMT is instead regarded by teachers and school administrators as yet another level of authority.

Partially a result of donor pressure to achieve “objectively verifiable results,” the MoEYS has a strongly quantitative emphasis in the monitoring system it has erected to guide CFS. Reporting by schools (on MoEYS forms) is almost completely numeric, little attention to quality or relational issues. This does not promote self-reflection by educators on the quality of their work, reflection that anyway is not an ordinary part of Cambodian culture.

Kim (2011a, 2011b) highlights the current discrepancy between education-related policy (which makes basic education mandatory for children; in fact, failure to educate children is one of two grounds on which the state can remove legal responsibility for a child from a parent) and the practice of child labour (Cambodia still has one of the highest rates of child labour in SE Asia). Kim concludes that there are two main reasons why child labour continues to be a major obstacle to achievement of the nation’s goal of universal basic education, and both relate to governance (2011a). One is the passivity of national education policy makers who fail to see child labour as a problem in part because of “a somewhat uncritical acceptance of the ‘poverty’ discourse for explaining child labour” (C-Y. Kim, 2011a, p. 497). Kim’s argument that the attitudes and beliefs of authorities (whether policy-makers at national level or parents at household level) rather than social reality is a stronger deterrent to achievement of Education for All is in part based on evidence which contradicts conventional wisdom about child labour. In Cambodia child labour is positively associated with household wealth, where households own productive assets like land (and about 75 percent of working children are engaged in family agriculture). And, citing Cambodia-specific results of the Understanding Children’s
Work research (2006), Kim also suggests that gender disparity in education “may not always be because girls work more than boys, but may reflect other reasons such as parental attitudes toward girls’ education” (p. 499, italics mine). The second major challenge relates to political will: “widespread corruption, insufficient national revenue and the low motivation and abilities of people in civil/public service have made the implementation of education policy difficult” (p. 503).

Tan (2008) makes a similar point to Kim’s in posing the question of whether or not the MoEYS’s aim of producing honest and ethical children is possible given the prevailing socio-political context in which corruption is endemic. Tan diplomatically concludes that “the prevalent practice of [systemic] corruption and the cultural preference for social harmony, conformity and passivity make the desired outcomes of civic and moral education difficult to achieve” (2008, p. 560).

Expenditure on education is another systemic issue hindering implementation of various educational reforms. Cambodia is one of ten countries in the world that spend less than two percent of their GDP on education (Lall, 2008, p. 1). Though 60 percent of the public expenditure on education is allocated to primary education, Cambodia spends just 6.7 percent of GDP per capita per primary student, half the median (14.6 percent) spent for countries in the East Asia and Pacific region (Lall, 2008, p. 1). In ASEAN, only Myanmar and Indonesia spend less on education than Cambodia.

**Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

There are numerous ways in which policy and practice can better consider the local context in the interest of more effective, appropriate, and equitable basic education for Cambodian children. It is vital to recognise the harm done by imposing foreign ideals,
especially in a resource-poor environment. It is essential to solicit, and genuinely engage with, local voices in order to arrive at a situation that enables local educators to provide an environment conducive to learning that is appropriate for and sustainable within the local context. To do this requires acknowledgment that there are fundamental cultural differences which influence the educational enterprise.

One general recommendation for proponents of educational reform in Cambodia whatever their organisational link, is that it may be useful to consider incorporating aspects of educational practice used in Hong Kong or Japan (rather than the USA or Europe) as those cultures are perhaps more similar to Cambodia, for instance with a strong tradition of rote learning, and have also traditionally been grounded in some of the same values. Yet they currently have some of the world’s best achieving students, whereas Cambodia is at the opposite end of the achievement spectrum.

Despite the apparent intractability of competing values, it nevertheless does seem possible to accommodate the concept of Child Friendly Schools in Cambodia though not without a sea-change in approach to developing capacity amongst numerous stakeholders, as well as transforming the educational system itself. There is evidence which indicates that some change (read: movement toward global ideals) has/is already occurring – for instance, reduced application of corporal punishment, increased good-will between students and teachers, teacher recognition of variation in student learning speeds and ability, recognition among teachers of a greater variety of pedagogical methods, and so forth. It will take significant time and creative effort to capitalise on changes that have already occurred.

Note, these recommendations relate to education in general, and are not meant to be specifically or solely applied to “improving CFS.” This research does not assume that CFS is
sufficiently relevant to merit simple adjustments toward greater effectiveness; therefore the focus is on seeking ways to adapt and constructively localise education which includes a significant dose of exogenous influence in the form of policy transfer, to result in meaningful, quality education.

**Applying social justice as a policy driver**

Using social justice as a basis for education enables us to look at culture in context, not requiring that we become anthropologists, but demanding that we take seriously the worldview and socio-cultural norms of a given education site. It also requires expanding the dominant utilitarian perspectives on the educational enterprise. Walker (2012, p. 391) suggests several elements that would constitute what she calls a human capability paradigm for education. Pedagogical approaches in this paradigm would be transformative, dialogic, participatory, discussion-based, questioning. They would include Socratic methods. They would be inclusive and contain intercultural methods. It would require critical analysis to question knowledge and taken-for-granted perspectives. And such pedagogies would foster ability to express a point of view and defend it individually and collectively.

Tikly and Barret (2011) suggest that “good quality education” from a social justice perspective is necessarily inclusive, relevant, and democratic (p. 9). They offer an explicit definition of what that kind of education might look like – I suggest that definitions must necessarily come from those who are going to be educated and doing the educating; or else this approach is not any more humane, just, or holistic than the human capital or basic needs approach/s to education. Nussbaum states: “Education should be construed not merely as a provider of useful skills, but also, and more centrally, as a general empowerment of the person through information, critical thinking, and imagination” (Nussbaum, 2006:322–323 cited by
Polat, 2011, p. 57). Taking this as a starting point, the international education community should seek to create space for dialogue around local visions and versions of “information, critical thinking, and imagination” (or variants).

**Recognising cultural differences**

Cultural dissonance causes cognitive and behavioural dissonance. One of the clearest examples of this in Cambodian educational enactment is corporal punishment. Teachers express feeling disempowered by the restrictions on corporal punishment, and are uncertain how to proceed in the absence of this option for managing behaviour. As one Grade 6 teacher explained: “It is difficult because they don’t let teachers use violence in class. If the teacher can be more strict then group work will function better” (I-P70). Thus, it is critically important to discuss the rationale behind this, and to facilitate familiarity with culturally appropriate viable options that teachers can employ.

Chapter Five contains considerable detail on several other socio-cultural elements which directly impact education. Among others, these include expectations of certainty, shame and blame as corrective mechanisms, consultative forms, honour/face, and stability/harmony, hierarchical social and political system/s, belief about the locus for learning, and understanding of the relationship between education, knowledge, and learning. If the quality of public education in LICs is to improve, then borrowers and lenders of educational ideas must take seriously their cultural differences. As Sternberg wryly notes:

> When cultural context is taken into account, (a) individuals are better recognised for and are better able to make use of their talents, (b) schools teach and assess children better, and (c) society utilizes rather than waste the talents of its members. Instruction and assessment can only be improved by taking cultural context into account. (Sternberg, 2007, p. 18).
As mentioned above in discussion of historical cultural influences on Cambodia, there are some interesting parallels between Cambodia and India so application of education-related research from that country might be useful. For instance, comparing education in China and India, Rao & Nairan (2003) explore reasons why China has vastly outperformed India in all primary school-related indicators though levels of financial investment have been similar. These authors identify seven points of contrast and comparison: level/extreme of economic development, role of the state in education, education policy/ideology and implementation, linkages between educational-economic-social policies, and physical education-related infrastructure; cultural belief systems relevant to education, classroom teaching and learning processes, and teacher characteristics/teacher culture. Three points explicitly address cultural influences.

One major difference is that in China there is strong belief in the influence of individual effort as a means for achievement whilst India maintains predisposition for pre-determination, which discourages effort. The Indian beliefs in karma and adherence to the caste system are two central [Hindu-Brahmanic] beliefs that directly influence education; together, these effectively shut out a large portion of the population from participation in any formal education and negatively influence the motivation of many who do manage to participate. In summarising the influence of culture on education in India, then, Rao & Nairan (2003) conclude that low school enrolment and literacy levels are more due to shared beliefs about social order than they are to India’s economic situation (Weiner, 1991 cited in Rao & Nairan, 2003, p. 168). This is precisely the situation in Cambodia.
Addressing gender-related challenges

There is clearly need for more (nuanced) cognizance of gender-related issues in education, as well as to develop greater and more widespread capacity for creatively addressing gender issues at all levels of MoEYS. The decision to mainstream (read: sideline) gender within MoEYS by assigning responsibility to the “Gender Working Group” has further marginalised the concept of gender and undermined the seriousness with which other departments treat the issues. Gender at this level is now seen as being addressed through setting up a system of girls’ counsellors and constructing dormitories to facilitate attendance. However, this perpetuates the simplistic notion of gender and education as “girls in school” and the idea that females must do the hard work of single-handedly overcoming cultural barriers to full social participation.

There are too few role models of female teachers and administrators, especially at higher levels – lower and upper secondary and especially in tertiary education) and administrators. One possible way to address this is with a quota system. Provincial TTC records indicate that more women than men are currently enrolled in teacher training: while on the surface this may be judged as progress, in fact it could have the negative impact of feminising especially the lower levels of schooling, and thereby further trivialising teaching as a profession, and formal education more broadly (A. Chan, 2011).

Another observation is that the curriculum and attendant materials would benefit from sharpening the gender lens of the people developing them. Some attention has obviously been paid to equitable depiction of males and females, particularly in illustrations; but more fundamentally, textbooks do not trouble the existing gender status quo that clearly favours males.
Addressing philosophical challenges

Khmer epistemological and pedagogical norms differ from the Western ideals espoused in policy, but significant pressure is applied by the educational system in the direction of those policy ideals. This tension is not adequately accounted for. To lessen the tension, and provide a more satisfactory learning experience for children, it will be necessary to actively involve practitioners (teachers, parents, students) in dialogue about their culture and values, and about their vision and aspirations for education. Active involvement could be facilitated in a number of different ways; for instance, through initiation of discussion around underlying values which may be in conflict. Another way is to conduct a values exploration process with key stakeholders to identify a more effective “middle way” for education, one that lies between global orthodoxies and local cultural inclinations for pedagogy and classroom practice. Dialogue around Khmer proverbs and adages is one very effective way to frame such conversation (see Arensen, 2002 for an example).

In regard to philosophical issues, there would seem to be room for application of theories, methods, and conceptual frameworks arising from the discourse around Indigenous Ways of Knowing (IWK). IWK requires, among other things, recognition and acknowledgement of the following: physical and theoretical place, the spiritual realm, and the notion of holism and integration. Khmer culture resonates with these three concepts.

Practically speaking, education sector advocates could work to shift the system’s focus from teaching to learning, including how to assess learning. This will require greater attention to the language of education and attending to the differentiation and description of varying aspects of the learning enterprise in a way that makes sense to implementers in their (predominantly) rural locations.
One contributor to limited preparation is the teachers’ belief that because they already know the materials well (as they have already taught it multiple times), there is no need to spend time preparing. This perception is directly related to underlying educational values (views of what comprises knowledge, how learning is best facilitated, a teacher’s role, and so forth), which underscores the need to interrogate local beliefs and values around education, knowledge, and learning.

**Addressing pedagogical challenges**

It is possible to envision several ways to address pedagogical challenges that currently hamper education in Cambodia. One way is to recognise and incorporate the fact that rural Cambodia remains a largely oral society, though of course it is in transition toward becoming a literate society. For instance the antiphonal teacher/student exchange which classes readily fall into could be used more intentionally to greater positive effect. There are also other culturally prescribed oral traditions that could be employed in the classroom, such as *Poonyeak Aram* (described in Chapter 6). Another is to engage in dialogue with practitioners about where/how to incorporate more robust versions of “rote learning” into the CFS model. This appears to be the default teaching style in Cambodia, and its merits must be acknowledged.

**Addressing political/systems challenges**

There are several possible process changes that could make a positive difference to modifying educational policies like CFS in order to make them culturally appropriate. One is to foster dialogue with teachers and practitioners about the values-basis of such reforms and foreign models. Another is to consider ways that elements of the reforms can be rendered manageable, and phased in rather than required as a whole systems change.
Recent research on factors affecting technology adoption in Cambodia empirically supports the common sense idea that “the choice to adopt… [is] most significantly influenced if use of the…skills was perceived to be easy and mandatory” (Richardson, 2011, p. 697). CFS is already mandatory, but is so complicated and multi-faceted as to be overwhelming. Simplifying various elements of the CFS framework, and providing hands-on instruction, can make CFS (or any educational policy) easier for teachers to conceptualise and implement.

Despite all the potential [physical/logistical] barriers to effective teaching and learning, it is possible to envision teaches rising to the challenge of good school management in the form of basic performance requirements (such as one lesson plan per day). This is important since, at this relatively early stage in the change process, it is most likely that teaches will comply with requirements from their immediate superior – the level of School Director.

It is important also to focus on consolidating change that has already occurred; for example, providind instruction to teachers about group management. Teachers and students are now quite accustomed to group work, though not maximising the synergistic possibilities that group work affords. So even if nothing else changes, improvement in the way that groups function would benefit students.

Another recommendation is for the MoEYS to revise the existing ad hoc, cascade training model to a more comprehensive, intentionally sequenced capacity building approach which also includes extensive follow-up and support (Pearson, 2011). Furthermore, MoEYS (and donors) should ensure that training is conducted in a way that models the principles being taught because learning by doing is a traditional Khmer way of gaining skills. For instance collective learning should not be taught in a didactic manner but rather, in experiential form. There is also need to rationalise the RGC’s numerous policies and prakas relating to basic
education and children’s rights so that the conventional but insufficiently nuanced “poverty discourse” cannot derail the possibility of quality education for every Cambodian child.

Currently, there is very little connection between research and policy in the education sector. Thus, this research recommends conducting research to de-bunk assumptions (about learning and learners) and dismantle easy arguments (such as the poverty discourse), and to develop evidence-based programming. The World Bank’s study on educational achievement and study on scholarships for girls are two pieces of research that could be immediately applied to calibrating educational policy.

And a final recommendation relating to systems challenges is to seriously acknowledge the fact/s of tired teachers with minimal time to prepare lessons and materials. This is too often used as an excuse for poor educational practice, rather than taken as a given and incorporated into planning and practice. Simplifying the lesson plan format is one way to enable and encourage teachers to prepare more. Making budget provisions for photocopying would also reduce the time that teachers spend (re)writing parts of the lesson/s for use in their classes.

**Required Research**

This inquiry revealed several related research gaps requiring attention. This current study has made a strong case for listening to the subaltern local voices; future research must hear those voices and take them into serious consideration in order to arrive at an educational model that has real potential to equip Cambodian children with knowledge, skills, and character necessary for an uncertain future.

First, there is urgent need for Khmer educators and academics to work on developing the very rudimentary epistemological frame that was begun in this research. Fleshing out the contours of a Cambodian philosophy of education would assist in identifying points of
potential connection and of contradiction in education policies the RGC considers adopting. Second, there is a need for doing the difficult work of contextualising both exogenous education models and traditional educational preferences. This could be done by expanding from the non-formal arena to the formal education system, work done by Berkvens with Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory. It would also be enlightening to follow the lead of Nguyen, Terlouw, Pilot, and Elliott (2009) in their experimental approach to adjusting pedagogical models based on mainstream Western social psychology in order to improve “fit” because “in relation to Asian contexts, Phuong-Mai (sic) and colleagues (2009) identify a complex web of cultural conflicts and mismatches that are likely to occur when Western…methodology is applied without rigorous adaptation to, and compatibility with, the host culture” (Nguyen, Terlouw, Pilot & Elliott, 2009, p. 857-58).

Third, and closely linked to the preceding recommendation, there is a need for dialogue with practitioners (especially teachers and parents) around worldview and core values; what they are and how they might affect the educational enterprise. This could be done by facilitated discussion of local adages and proverbs relating to education, as demonstrated by Arensen (2002) around core values of development practitioners. It would also be useful to utilise Pratt’s Teaching Perspectives Inventory (TPI) (Pratt, 1998; Pratt, Collins & Selinger, 2001) with Cambodian teachers to help them identify their own dominant teaching perspective and move toward development of an educational philosophy. Pratt (1998) has identified five major teaching perspectives: transmission, apprenticeship, developmental, nurturing, and social reform. Another possible method for identifying values and generating discussion would be to employ critical discourse analysis of classroom practice through videoing of teacher practice, followed by debriefing and discussion.
Fourth, it would be highly instructive to re-visit Western scandalisation of rote learning, as this learning technique appears to be an essential aspect of Cambodian educational values and practice. Research strongly supports the view that memorising and rote learning are valuable learning methods, especially in combination with other learning modalities. There may be ways to improve how teachers use rote learning, and to expand teacher practice to include multiple-modality memorisation.

And finally, it is imperative to begin exploring the links between CFS and educational achievement in order to provide evidence on which effective educational policy can be built. To date, there have been no studies in Cambodia which demonstrate that CFS actually improves educational and learning outcome but it is touted in political documents and policies as “having led to improved outcomes.” In fact, there seems to be little evidence-base for the effectiveness of CFS at all: recent case studies produced by UNICEF do not talk so much about achievement and learning outcomes, as they do about how well countries have implemented CFS guidelines. In other words, some international measures too seem inclined to emphasise form rather than substance.

**Conclusion**

There is no doubt that globalisation directly impacts public and private education in every country of the world. The discourse most visibly influential in low income, post-conflict nations like Cambodia is generated by the [Western] education-for-development set and often takes the form of global campaigns such as Education for All. However, while public schooling may appear increasingly homogenous in this globalised environment, in fact at classroom level, practice is very dynamic and may bear little resemblance to rhetorical norms in both form and achievement. And, generally, quality remains low.
There are four popular ways to explain the limited quality and poor results of mass education delivered to Cambodia’s children: benign neglect under French colonial power, destruction caused by protracted conflict and especially the Khmer Rouge regime, lack of Western assistance for an extended period and an entrenched socialist system with a strongly political agenda for education, and the discourse of poverty. Other LICs will doubtless have a similar collection. While there is some truth in each of these, they tell just part of the story. Two key factors are insufficiently recognised in the literature currently. First, that educational policy resides at the nexus of four main types of external influence: global (formal and informal), regional constructs; international development (transnational, multilateral, bilateral, non-government agencies); and global and international educational trends and discourse. In other words, global discourse is mediated through regional and national history and current socio-economic realities and therefore arrives (and is understood by recipients) in a quite different form than it was dispatched and is received by culture-rich recipients. And second, that domestic socio-cultural inclinations also influence the capacity and the will of recipients to understand and implement foreign ideas. In other words, culture matters. In the case of Cambodia the dissonance between Western, hegemonic educational forms and Cambodian culture, values, and rural orientation is clearly seen in local responses of deployment, incorporation, adaptation, contestation, and resistance. The strong influence of traditional social and behavioural norms on the understanding and practice of “gender and education” is one very clear example of this.

A more coherent and contextualised (and therefore relevant and vernacular) version of basic education can be achieved by applying a social justice frame which is firmly grounded in the notion of human rights, including gender equality, and necessarily includes dialogue
around cultural norms and value orientation. For policy sharing to succeed, senders and recipients alike must seriously, carefully attend to local context, particularly how worldview mediates practice.
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## Appendix 1: Description of Multiple Layers of Global Influence on Education

### CHARTING GLOBAL INFLUENCES

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<tr>
<th>Influence (level, type)</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>GLOBAL LEVEL</strong></td>
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| Informal influence     | - Computers, television, other electronic media widely available for general public.  
- Rapid and wide and varied communication & information.  
- Cambodians travel; Cambodians in diaspora return to visit family – extending exposure to new places & ideas.  
- Global employment trends – such as garment factories; tourism; sex trade; human trafficking shape job opportunities.  
- Expectations for education leading to wealth.  
- “Diploma”-mania. |          |
| Formal influences      | - Global governance structure and goals for education (EFA, MDG, etc.).  
- Neoliberal influence, including emphasis on efficiency.  
- Cambodians educated outside nation by various benefactors.  
- Educational policies and modalities are promoted by multilateral organisations: carrot of employment & stick of financial support.  
- More open-ness to foreign ideas. |          |
| **REGIONAL INFLUENCES**|             |          |
| ASEAN (general, economic) | - English as official ASEAN language.  
- Bloc trade (and other) agreements.  
- Greater Mekong Sub-region – linked by roads and trade. |          |
| ASEAN (+2, +3) (education-specific) | - Move toward common education standards.  
- Significant education and economic disparity within region.  
- Regional countries provide aid (and focus) for education.  
- Strong neoliberal agenda: education for global competitiveness.  
- English as common language. |          |
| China, Korea, Japan vying for influence. | - Road construction.  
- Greater Mekong Sub-region affiliation.  
- Telecommunication infrastructure.  
- Trade agreements.  
- Land concessions; population displacement, environmental degradation.  
- Results are subtle, aims & priorities often not synched with the “formal global governance structure.”  
- China gives grants with “no strings” for projects denied on environmental grounds by mainstream development groups.  
- Influence toward educational streaming (vocational, academic tracks). |          |
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<td><strong>INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT</strong></td>
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| Multilateral influence on                  | ▪ Traditional public administration (TPA).  
▪ NPM (New Public Management) Model.  
▪ NIE (New Institutional Economics) Model.  
▪ “Capable State” approach to development promoted by WB.                                                                                     | ▪ “Political and social accountabilities” approach  
▪ 3-way accountability to include community level.  
▪ “Aid effectiveness” rhetoric.                                                                                                                   |
| aid, governance, and accountability         | (non-education specific)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Multilateral influence                      | ▪ “Cultures of funding & management (Preston, 2005).  
▪ Budget & priorities from “centre” (MDG, EFA, etc.).  
▪ Introduction of international standardization & reporting indicators and mechanisms.  
▪ Themes include focus on: ethnic minorities, gender, poor as “the unreached” (Collins, 2009).                                             | ▪ WB – priority is basic education.  
▪ ADB – priority is secondary education.  
▪ Higher education – increasingly open to market forces.  
▪ Financial assistance a major motive for RGC to comply.                                                                                       |
| (education-specific)                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Bilateral influence                         | ▪ Now mostly in concert with MDG/EFA.  
▪ Still some variation and differing priorities                                                                                                                                                        | Financial assistance a major motive for RGC to comply.  
▪ Short-term funding; rapid turn-over of advisors; results oriented not optimal for implementation.                                                                                                       |
| (education-specific)                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| NGO influence                               | ▪ Service delivery is accountable directly back to contracting agency, making for often varied, uncoordinated, complex situation.  
▪ Emphasis: environmental sustainability, human rights, good governance, ethnic minority rights, vibrant civil society, human trafficking, etc. | ▪ Impact is that “Horizontal accountability” rendered impossible (Pak et al., 2007).  
▪ Aid tends to be deficit focused, rather than asset-focused.                                                                                     |
| (non education-specific)                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| NGO influence                               | ▪ Primarily in line with multilateral EFA goals.  
▪ Promote bilingual/mother-tongue education and focus on access for ethnic minorities, girls, the poor.  
▪ Higher education, vocational training, literacy also priority.  
▪ Increasing push for quality.                                                                                                                  | ▪ NGO involvement may reduce need for RGC involvement.  
▪ NGO-funded efforts often not sustainable and they stop when NGO leaves.  
▪ May encourage dependency.                                                                                                                    |
| (education-specific)                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| **GLOBAL & INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION TRENDS & DISCOURSE** |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Decentralisation                            | Community-based participation is a strong policy-level emphasis; with effort to implement at local level.                                                                                                                                                           | − Turner, 2002; Pellini, 2007.  
− Downloading responsibility to private sector.                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Pedagogical trends                          | − Student/learner-centred pedagogy.  
− Cooperative learning.  
− Inquiry-based learning.                                                                                                                                                                             | Contradicts traditional influence of Buddhist emphasis on memorization & recitation.                                                                                                                                         |
<p>| Standardisation in testing                  | − Testing and international standards increasingly introduced and influential (PISA, etc.).                                                                                                                                                                          | World Bank promoting national testing.                                                                                                                                                                                     |</p>
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<th>Influence (level, type)</th>
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| Particular emphasis    | Early childhood education (ECE) (school readiness).  
                       | Quality – no clear definitions. | Emphases shift every 2-3 years, making it difficult to consolidate any gains or changes. |
| Girls to School        | Linking female education with greater productivity and national economy GDP/GNP as rationale to educate females.  
                       | UNGEI (United Nations Girls Education Initiative) launched in 2000 at World Education Forum. | A gender gap in favour of males persists globally, with some national exceptions. More males then females literate; more males have more formal education than females. |
| Curriculum             | Academic vs. vocational – requiring students to decide their track early on.  
                       | Emphasis on life skills and “economic strengthening.” | |
| Language/s of instruction | English replaces (French) as dominant second-language.  
                        | Korean, Japanese, Thai, Chinese are popular additional languages. | |
| Educational psychology | Western views remain deeply embedded and “invisible” to education regime. | |
| Major discourse        | Human capital; competitiveness in the global economy  
                       | Lifelong learning (1996 – Delors Report)  
                       | Knowledge economy (term/concept introduced by Peter Drucker, 1966, *The Effective Executive*)  
                       | Global citizenship / multiculturalism  
                       | Brain drain / brain circulation  
                       | Commodification /marketing (especially of higher education) |
Appendix 2: Comprehensive Question List for all Stakeholders

A. Question protocol – MoEYS (centre & provincial); multilateral donors/agencies (Sida, UNICEF, World Bank)

Purpose of education

1. How would you summarise the purpose of basic education in Cambodia? What is its chief aim? How far is this being accomplished? What remains to be done to ensure it will be achieved?
2. What are the main areas of knowledge, skills, attitude (and exposure) you think are necessary for a Cambodian child of primary school age to have in order to meet the demands of the 21st century?
3. In what ways, and to what extent, are families involved in primary education in Cambodia? Why do you think this is the case? What do you think are the potential benefits / drawbacks of family involvement in the formal education system?

Educational reform (global links)

4. Can you give me a brief history of the educational reforms that have occurred over the past decade (or 2 decades)? Which of these “shifts” have been effective (ineffective)?
5. Who determines the overall direction (extent, pace) of educational reform in Cambodia, and how is this done?
6. Are cultural considerations part of the discussion on educational reform?
7. From what cultural basis do educational reforms, specifically CFS, derive?
8. How are educational reforms in Cambodia related to larger, global educational reforms?
9. Who determines the nature of curriculum and teaching methods?
10. What are the cultural sources of curriculum and teaching methods?
11. To what extent do the curriculum and teaching methods now in place reflect Khmer philosophy?

Child-friendly schools

12. I know that CFS has been functioning in Cambodia since about 2001. And now it has recently been made a policy. Can you briefly explain what CFS is? Please summarise the aims of the Child Friendly School policy for me.
13. How/do the 6 aims of CFS specifically, reflect Khmer ways of thinking, Khmer values?
   a. All children have access to schooling (inclusive schools).
   b. Effective learning.
   c. Health, safety, and protection of children.
   d. Gender responsiveness.
   e. The participation of children, families, and communities in running their local school.
   f. MoEYS support/encourages schools to become more “child friendly”.

Relationship with external agencies [bilateral & multilateral donors, NGOs]

14. How would you describe the relationship between MoEYS and its main (bilateral) donors? [clarify who the donors are]
15. What problems have you encountered while working with bilateral donors/MoEYS?
16. Can you give me an example of (previous / current) conflict or tension between MoEYS/bilateral donors?
17. While Cambodia’s budgetary contribution to education is steadily increasing, the annual education budget is still primarily contributed by foreign donors – what is your feeling about this? (Do you think this may influence decision-making? Why/why not? In what ways?)
18. Is there a difference in the relationship between Western donors and Asian donors? Please explain.
19. In addition to funding, what (if anything) do bilateral donors contribute to education?
20. Would you like to see an RGC/donor relationship to continue permanently in the education sector, or do you think it is just a temporary situation?
21. If there was no need for donor funding, and donors did not provide any support for education in Cambodia, would education be done differently? (How?)
22. There are many NGOs in Cambodia who are also involved in providing or assisting with education in one way or another: how would you describe the MoEYS’s relationship with these NGOs?
23. Can you give me an example of a particularly successful (education-sector) NGO, and explain why you think they are successful?
24. Do you think that NGOs will be required to work in the education sector for much longer? Is their presence sustainable? Desirable?

Quality issues
25. I know that Cambodia has been very hard at work to achieve the Education for All goals. Do you think Cambodia is on track to meet the EFA targets? Why or why not?
26. As you know, Cambodia’s neighbours are also trying to achieve EFA. Can you briefly describe how Cambodia is doing in the education sector, compared to its nearest neighbours (Thailand, Vietnam, Laos)?
27. As we know, “quality” is an increasingly used term in conversation about education. But, there are not exact standards for “quality” related to education. Can you define “quality” for me as you understand it to apply to the Cambodia context/situation?
28. Some people speak of an urban/rural “gap” in Cambodia (with urban areas receiving much more by way of quality infrastructure and services) – does this exist in the education sector? (Is anything being done to address the gap, if it exists?)
29. In your mind, what remains the biggest single issue that Cambodian primary education must address in order achieve consistent “quality” in all schools across the country?

B. Question protocol – RUPP faculty

Additional questions to Protocol A:

Educational evolution
1. As we know, Cambodia has a difficult history with a lot of conflict. During various periods, education has looked very different. Can you reflect a little bit on how school-education has changed over time, as you yourself have observed it (participated in it)? How/has it changed in purpose, content, philosophy, quality, etc.?

Current aims / relevance
2. What is the (stated, underlying) purpose of education in Cambodia today?
3. Whose welfare is (most/least) served by the Cambodian system as it now stands – please explain.
4. Do you think that the Child-friendly schools package of six priority areas is relevant for Cambodia? Does it fit with “Cambodian ways”? Why or why not?
Personal background/philosophy
5. Can you explain your own personal “history of education” – what did you study, where, when and why did you decide to become a teacher, when did you join RUPP, etc.
6. What main beliefs/ideas have shaped your teaching? What is the source of these beliefs and ideas?
7. How would you summarise your own personal “philosophy of teaching/education”?

Comparison
8. Have you observed education in other country/ies? If so, how would you compare Cambodian education with what you have seen or experienced in other country/ies?

Future priorities
9. What do you see as the top 1-2-3 priorities for the education sector and why? (relating to any level of education, not restricted to primary or basic education).

C. Question protocol – RUPP students

Personal background/philosophy
1. Why are you (have you chosen) to study in this M.Ed. course?
2. What do you aim to do with the learning/degree once you have completed?
3. How would you summarise your own personal “philosophy of teaching/education”?
4. What main beliefs/ideas have shaped your teaching? What is the source of these ideas?

Aim/Purpose of formal education
5. What do you see as the chief aim of formal education, especially basic education, as it now happens in Cambodia?
6. What are the underlying values and goals?
7. What are the main areas of knowledge, skills, attitude (and exposure) you think are necessary for a Cambodian child of primary school age to have in order to meet the demands of the 21st century?
8. In your opinion, whose welfare is (most/least) served by the Cambodian system as it now stands – please explain.

Educational reform (global links)
9. Can you think how are educational reforms in Cambodia might be/are related to larger, global educational reforms?
10. Who determines the overall direction (extent, pace, etc.) of educational reform in Cambodia, and how is this done?
11. Who determines the nature of curriculum and teaching methods in Cambodia?
12. What are the cultural sources of the Cambodian curriculum and the teaching methods being promoted through Teacher Training?

Funding/donors
13. While Cambodia’s budgetary contribution to education is steadily increasing, the annual education budget is still primarily contributed by foreign donors – do you think that this influences decision-making? Why/why not? In what ways?
14. In addition to funding, what (if anything) do bilateral donors contribute to education?
15. Would you like to see an RGC/donor relationship to continue in the education sector, or do you think it is just a temporary necessity?
Culture and education

16. To what extent do the curriculum and teaching methods now in place reflect Khmer philosophy, Khmer understanding of the world?
17. Regarding the content of the curriculum, do you think it is sufficiently “Khmer”? Is it too “Khmer”? How would you improve it, if you had the opportunity?

Quality issues

18. As we know, “quality” is an increasingly used term in conversation about education. Can you define “quality” as you understand it to apply to the Cambodia situation?
19. In your mind, what remains the biggest single issue that Cambodian primary education must address in order achieve consistent “quality” in all schools across the country?

D. Question protocol – NGO (networks, key informants, staff, etc.)

Additional questions (to Protocol A):

Relevance/appropriateness

1. Is the current version of education in Cambodia relevant to Cambodia (culturally, economically, etc.)?
2. Is it appropriate? (How could it be changed to be more appropriate?)
3. Is, and in what ways is, “Khmer” or “Cambodian” culture integrated into the formal education system? Please explain.

Capacity

4. “Capacity” is a word we hear often in relation to the RGC – how would you define this particular term?
5. Then, how would you rate the RGC in relation to capacity for implementing high quality education?

E. Question Protocol – CFS Monitoring Team/s

Purpose/aim of education

1. How would you summarise the purpose of basic education in Cambodia? What is its chief aim?
2. How far is this being accomplished? What remains to be done to ensure it will be achieved?
3. Who determines the overall direction (extent, pace) of educational reform in Cambodia, and how is this done?
4. Who determines the nature of curriculum and teaching methods? Where does the CFS idea come from?
5. What are the cultural sources of curriculum and teaching methods? To what extent do the curriculum and teaching methods now in place reflect Khmer philosophy?

Child-friendly schools

6. Can you summarise the aim/purpose of CFS?
7. Is CFS a good thing for Cambodia? Why/why not?
8. How/do the 6 aims of CFS specifically, reflect Khmer ways of thinking, Khmer values?
   a) All children have access to schooling (inclusive schools).
   b) Effective learning.
   c) Health, safety, and protection of children.
   d) Gender responsiveness.
e) The participation of children, families, and communities in running their local school.
f) MoEYS support/encourages schools to become more child friendly.

9. Which of the 6 aims are/will be the most difficult to achieve, and why?
10. When you are conducting monitoring and training, do you change anything about the CFS to make it easier to apply? Can you explain what you change?

**F. Question Protocol – Teachers (At RTTC & Village)**

**Personal background/philosophy**

1. What aspect/s of teaching most interest/s you?
2. What are your main need/s, as teacher/s? Are they being met?
3. How would you summarise your own personal “philosophy of teaching/education”?
4. What main beliefs/ideas have shaped your teaching? What is the source of these ideas?
5. Why did you choose to become a teacher?
6. How effective was your training in preparing you to teach in the classroom? What area/s do you wish had been covered better/more?
7. Is the current system of monitoring helpful for you? Too much / too little?

**Purpose/aim of education**

8. How would you summarise the purpose of basic education in Cambodia? What is its chief aim? How far is this being accomplished? What remains to be done to ensure it will be achieved?
9. Whose welfare is (most/least) served by the Cambodian system as it now stands – please explain.
10. What are the main areas of knowledge, skills, attitude (and exposure) you think are necessary for a Cambodian child of primary school age to have in order to meet the demands of the 21st century?

**Educational reform**

11. What major changes, if any, have been required from you since you started teaching? What was the purpose of those changes? Who initiated the changes?
12. Who determines the overall direction of educational reform in Cambodia, and how?
13. Can you think how are educational reforms in Cambodia might be/are related to larger, global educational reforms?
14. Who determines the nature of curriculum and teaching methods in Cambodia?
15. What are the cultural sources of curriculum and teaching methods?

**Khmer influence**

16. To what extent do the curriculum and teaching methods now in place reflect Khmer philosophy, Khmer understanding of the world?
17. Regarding the content of the curriculum, do you think it is sufficiently “Khmer”? Is it “too Khmer”? How would you improve it, if you had the opportunity?
18. Regarding the “new pedagogy” of child-centred learning: is this a Khmer idea? Do you think it is suitable for/will work in Cambodia? Why or why not?
19. Some people speak of an urban/rural “gap” in Cambodia (with urban areas receiving much more by way of quality infrastructure and services) – does this exist in the education sector? What does it look like?

**Education quality**

20. Can you define “quality” for me as you understand it to apply to Cambodian education?
21. In your mind, what remains the biggest single issue that Cambodian primary education must address in order achieve consistent “quality” in all schools across the country?

G. Question Protocol For Library

**Purpose:**
1. Get more information about the resources available in the library
2. Observe a library class – is there any structure? What do children do with their time? How does librarian interact with them?
3. What does librarian think is the purpose of the library? What is its value for this school, these children?
4. Talk to children who are using the library; find out what they think about it.

**Resources @ library:**
1. What topics are available?
2. In these various topics, are there particular themes covered (ie. in “reading” is there a set of books about traditional stories, or myths? Any series about particular characters?).
3. What are the most popular 5 books that students like?
4. What have community people ‘checked out’ of the library? (last time we talked to her she said that community people come sometimes. Now I want more details!)
5. Do teachers ever use the library? If so, for what?
6. Is the library used for other than library classes? If so, for what?
7. Does the librarian ever read to children?
8. Has the library ever attempted to organise events around reading?
9. Does librarian know how to teach children to read?
10. Make a map of the library lay-out: What are all the things stored in the library? Seems to be a lot more than just books for kids.

**Questions for kids who are in the library:**
1. How often do you come here? Only when your class comes, or other times to? If other time, when and why?
2. What are your favourite kinds of books? Why?
3. Do you have a single favourite book?
4. How many books have you read in the past month?
5. Can you use the library during the summer/holiday months or is it closed?
6. Do you think that you could ever write a book? Why/why not?
7. What would you write about?

H. Question Protocol - Community Leaders

**Aim/Purpose of formal education**
1. What do you see as the chief aim of formal education, especially basic education, as it now happens in Cambodia?
2. What are the underlying values and goals?
3. What are the main areas of knowledge, skills, attitude (and exposure) you think are necessary for a Cambodian child of primary school age to have in order to meet the demands of the 21st century?
4. In your opinion, whose welfare is (most/least) served by the Cambodian system as it now stands – please explain.
Relevance/appropriateness
5. Is the current version of education in Cambodia relevant (culturally, economically, etc.)?
6. Is it appropriate? (How could it be changed to be more appropriate?)
7. Is, and in what ways is, “Khmer” or “Cambodian” culture integrated into the formal education system? Please explain.
8. Some people speak of an urban/rural “gap” in Cambodia (with urban areas receiving much more by way of quality infrastructure and services) – does this exist in the education sector? What does it look like?

Quality issues
9. As we know, “quality” is an increasingly used term in conversation about education. Can you define “quality” as you understand it to apply to the Cambodia situation?
10. In your mind, what remains the biggest single issue that Cambodian primary education must address in order achieve consistent “quality” in all schools across the country?

Benefits from formal education
11. What do you see as benefits of children attending school?
12. Can you give an example of some children (a person) who has benefited in this way?

I. Question Protocol – Parents / Caregivers

Personal background
1. Did you go to school when you were a child? If yes, can you describe a little of the experience to me?
2. Do you think school has changed since then? How is your child’s school and education experience different from yours?
3. Can you reflect a little bit on how school-education has changed over time, as you have observed it? (Has it changed in purpose, content, philosophy, quality, etc.?)

Purpose/aim of education
4. What is the purpose of education in Cambodia today? What is the value of “being educated”?
5. Why do people send their children to school? (What is the role of education/school?)
6. Why do you send your child/ren to school? (What do you hope this will do for the child? For your family? For your community? For society? For the nation?)
7. What are the most important things your child could / should learn in school?
8. What knowledge, skills, attitudes do you think school should teach/give/instil in your children?
9. What are the main areas of knowledge, skills, attitude (and exposure) you think are necessary for a Cambodian child of primary school age to have in order to meet the demands of the 21st century?
10. How would you describe a “good teacher”? What are her/his characteristics?
11. How would you describe a “good student”? What are her/his characteristics?

Appropriateness / relevance
12. What kind/s of things is your child learning about in school? What subjects do they study? What are they learning about those subjects/topics? (Is this different from what you learned as a child?)

48 PR activities – solicit traditional sayings and proverbs about education and parse them with participants, for deeper meaning.
13. Is the education your child receives now, useful/practical for your child? Why / why not?
14. Does your child ever use anything that she/he learns in school to help you (at home, in your business, on your farm, etc.)?
15. How/does your child use or apply what is learned when she/he is not in school?
16. What benefits of “education” have you personally seen for people in your village (can you give me a specific story or example?)

**Educational achievement**
17. Does your child like school? What do they like about it?
18. What do they not like about it? What do they say to you about school when they come home after school?
19. How is your child/ren doing in school? What grades are they getting? Are you pleased with their achievement? Why/why not?
20. What is the source of information on which you base your answer? (Do you go to school and talk to the teacher, does your child bring a report home, etc.)

**Parental involvement**
21. In what ways do you interact with your child about school? (Help with homework? Ask about grades? Walk them to school? etc.)
22. Do you have interaction with the school teachers? (If so, what kind, how often, at whose initiative, etc.?)

**External influence in education**
23. A lot of money for education in Cambodia comes from foreign agencies, rather than from the RGC. What do you think about this? (Do you think this is good/bad for education?) Would you like to see foreign money phased out, or continue for a long time?
24. Who determines the nature of curriculum and teaching methods?
25. What are the cultural sources of curriculum and teaching methods? To what extent do the curriculum and teaching methods now in place reflect Khmer philosophy?

**Reflections on learning**
26. Have you ever taught your child to do something? Please explain (what did you teach them, how did you do this, how did they respond, how did you know that they had ‘learned’, etc.)
27. What is your occupation? How did you learn to do that? Who taught you, how did this happen, etc.

**J. Question Protocol – Children / Students**

**Personal background**
1. What grade are you in?
2. How many years have you gone to school?
3. Is school important to your life? To your family’s life? To Cambodia?
4. If you were not going to school, what would you be doing instead?
5. What to you want to be when you grow up? (Where did you get this idea?)

**Purpose of education**
6. Tell me about your school -- do you like school? Why or why not?
7. What do you like about school?
8. What do you not like about school?
9. Why do you go to school? What is the purpose or aim? Where did you get your idea that this is the reason for going to school?
10. What do you do at school?
11. What do you learn about in school?
12. What subject/s interest you the most? Why?
13. What is useful for you about school, if anything?
14. Do you use what you learn at home? (please explain, give an example)
15. Do you talk to anyone about the things you learn, after you leave school each day? Who do you talk to about it? What do you tell them?

**Description of school**
16. Please describe your school to me: where is it located, how many rooms, what is your routine/schedule for getting ready and going to school, etc.
17. Do you go to a good school? What is a good school – what characteristics must it have to be considered a “good” school?
18. What is a “good” teacher?
19. What is a “good” student?

**Pedagogy**
20. Do you like to work alone or in a group? Why?
21. Do you know how to work in a group?
22. Do you ever ask questions in class? Why/why not?
23. Do you ever talk to your teacher outside of the classroom?
Appendix 3: Protocol for General Focus Group Discussion/s with Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protocol for FGD with Student (General)</th>
<th>Question &amp; Purpose</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Permission:</strong> Introduction &amp; obtain permission for recording</td>
<td>Comply with best practice ethical standards; put children at ease with the recorder.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Games:</strong></td>
<td>Games are to help facilitate participation and to make the whole exercise more fun.</td>
<td>We interspersed games between the questions/work activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Name game</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Land &amp; sea</td>
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<td>▪ Rabbit in a hole</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Samson, Delilah, lion</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Old man goes to market</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Brainstorm as a group; get one volunteer to write the list on flip-chart paper.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Question 1:</strong> Why do we go to school? What benefits do we hope to gain?</td>
<td>To ascertain what local priorities and aspirations are for participation in the ‘formal education’ venture – may differ from national-level rhetoric about purpose/aim of education, as well as differ from international discourse about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rank the items in the list,</strong> using 10 candies (10 seeds method), in terms of priority.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brainstorm as a group; get one volunteer to write the list.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Question 2:</strong> What do we like/not like about school?</td>
<td>To see what aspects of CFS children are attracted to, which are facilitate and are associated with learning, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rank,</strong> using 10 candies, in terms of priority.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hand o coloured paper, one piece for each student, and one marker each. <strong>Ask students to draw a picture of their favourite teacher.</strong> When all are done drawing, ask students to <strong>write on their paper,</strong> simple description of things they like about this teacher (why is she/he their favourite teacher?).</td>
<td><strong>Question 3:</strong> what are characteristics of teachers that children appreciate and respond well to?</td>
<td>To understand what attributes of a teacher would facilitate teaching and learning. How do these fit in with CFS aims; and with local understandings of CFS?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brainstorm, list, and then rank (by favourite, least favourite, etc.) activities that children do each day in school.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Question 4:</strong> what are all the activities you do at school (both classroom/ learning based and other)?</td>
<td>Get an idea of what types of work, pedagogy are enjoyable to the children; what they feel they learn best from.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4: Classroom Observation Checklist

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Date _________________________  Name of Observer ___________________________  
Grade _________________________  Name of Teacher ___________________________  
Subject _________________________

NOTE: AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE, DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN GIRLS AND BOYS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions to use in observing teaching &amp; learning processes in a classroom</th>
<th>Notes/observations/questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STARTING CLASS:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Did teacher greet students appropriately?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Did students greet teacher appropriately?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Was the teacher on time, in classroom waiting for students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Were students on time to class?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Is lateness addressed?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Note start/ending time of class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Note attendance levels (boys/girls).</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREPARATION/PLANNING</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Was the lesson well structured?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Were there clear aims &amp; objectives for the lesson? Were these made clear to students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Did the lesson build on past lessons &amp; link to future lessons?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Was the content made relevant to students’ location, lives, and rural reality?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPROACHES TO TEACHING &amp; LEARNING</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Was the lesson teacher-centred or student centred?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Did students learn independently or interactively?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Note how group work occurred – were all or just some students active, time managed, instructions clear, etc.?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Did students learn through concrete or vicarious experiences?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Were instructions explicit or indirect?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Where was the teacher located during this lesson? Did teacher move around the classroom and interact with students across the room?</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. How many different students were asked to read or participate?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Did teacher ask questions of students – what level?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Did students ask questions of teacher – what level?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATERIALS/RESOURCES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Did the teacher deviate from information or format of the teacher guidebook?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Were a variety of resources used? Give details.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Did these resources/materials support and enhance the learning objectives?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Was content factually correct?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Did teacher refer to any resources on classroom walls?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Is the classroom an aid to learning?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions to use in observing teaching &amp; learning processes in a classroom</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACTIVITIES</strong></td>
<td><strong>Notes/observations/questions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Were these clearly explained to students?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Did the activities match the ability range of the students?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Were there a variety of activities to match different learning styles?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Were students stretched/challenged during the lesson or were they “spoon fed”?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TIMING</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Was the pace of the lesson appropriate; too slow; too fast?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REINFORCEMENT / ASSESSMENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Does the teacher check that learning is taking place throughout the lesson? How was this done?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Which methods of assessment were used to show that students understood the content?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Were right answers, creativity, etc. praised and affirmed? How did this look?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How were mistakes addressed?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Is the learning environment disciplined and purposeful &amp; one in which all students can learn?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How are disruptive, disengaged, bored, or inattentive students brought back into the learning environment?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Are expectations of students high? How are they conveyed to students?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PUNISHMENT / VIOLENCE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How did teacher discipline students? Was corporal punishment used? If so, what did that look like?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Did teacher use threats to discipline students or bring order to the classroom? What did she/he threaten?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Did teacher use shaming or blaming to discipline students?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GENERAL OBSERVATIONS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Spark! Is the teacher enthusiastic?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do they generate an excitement in learning?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 5: Instructions for Textbook Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructions for textbook analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General instructions.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review each textbook and respond to the questions below. Some are quantitative questions; most are qualitative questions. Indicate page numbers to facilitate future referencing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We need to get an overview of what occurs in the books, what key messages are they sending, and not just a collection of individual facts. For example:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How many times, in total, are females referred to by name in text?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How many times are males referred to by name?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Who (male/female, young/old) is pictured as traditional? Who is pictured as modern? What are the signifiers of modern and traditional?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How many times, in total, are females pictured in traditional roles in illustrations. And so forth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analysing narrative flow and context.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some words or concepts to keep in mind for analysing narrative are: action (types of physical activity), locus (who is central? from who/where does action originate?), power (who has control, who makes decisions), visualisation (what images does the text conjure and why), focal point (who is the centre of attention?), emotions (what does the story/text make you feel and why) language used (pronouns, respectful terms, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analysing words/particular language usage.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some words/concepts to keep in mind for analysing language: names selected for characters in the text, use of nouns and pronouns, vocatives (forms of address that bestow/indicate status), other gendered preferences and associations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cover of text book.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What is pictured here? Traditional or non-traditional?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What is the ‘message’ given by the cover?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How does it make you feel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional response to content.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How does a particular chapter or section make the reader “feel” about males / females (positively inclined, negatively inclined; angry, proud, etc.)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does what you see/read bring up any memories of your own past experiences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender and activity in text &amp; illustrations.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How many (the number) males/females (and adults/children) are illustrated?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What is each person doing in the illustrations (what types of actions, in-action)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Types of roles: social, political, economic, domestic, international, family roles,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Dependency / passivity / independence / action / taking initiative / power / equality / traditional vs. non-traditional / positively or negatively portrayed / brave vs. cowardly / authority / etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ordering of images – who’s first and looks most important? Who’s bigger in the illustration? Who is prominent / secondary?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Instructions for textbook analysis

| Content inclusion/focus. | - Are men/women featured in historical events, political events, sporting events, positions of responsibility/authority? What are the reasons for inclusion/exclusion?  
| - Are males/females named or unnamed?  
| - Are proper names used in the book male or female names? (count the number of each).  
| - What popular metaphors are explicit or implicit in the text or illustrations; and what do these tell readers about males/females? |
| Roles (in pictures or text). | - Frequency & nature of appearance of female characters in each book. Can you explain trends you see?  
| - What roles are male/females portrayed in? Is there diversity?  
| - What occupation/s do males/females hold? Is there diversity?  
| - How are relationships between males/females portrayed (cooperative, conflictual, subservient, superior, etc.)?  
| - Are males/females featured as present in public life and/or private life?  
| - What are the physical characteristics of males/females?  
| - What are the psychological characteristics/traits of males/females?  
| - Are **ownership** and **power** and **decision-making** the prerogative of males or females in the textbook? To what extent? |
## Appendix 6: Overview of Indigenous Influences on Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cambodia: Influence is experienced differently at National (policy) level and Community (implementation) level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Ancient History**         | - Regional powerhouse for centuries, dominant over Thailand and Vietnam until past century.  
- Formerly a much larger land-mass, a glorious era frequently recalled.                                                                                                                                   | - Angkor era as “golden period” of greatness.  
- Fiefdoms, royal intrigue, internecine fighting.                                                                                                                                                    |
| **Worldview/Culture (Religion)** | - Major ethno-cultural construct is Buddhist/Hindu.  
- Brahmin influence - strongly hierarchical, quasi-caste system.  
- Patrimonial social organisation.  
- Animistic society; folk-Buddhism.  
- Minimal civil society.  
- Every limited culture of schooling (male religious education).  
- Warrior Heritage (Bit, 1991) – particular social behaviour & individual psychological behaviour  
- Notion of disproportionate revenge (Hinton)  
- Family, rather than community or individual, as central social construct (N.B. this “when every household is an island” thesis popularised by Ovesen, Trankell & Ojendal is at least partially disputed by Ledgerwood & Vijgen (2002). |
| **History of education (major epochs as described by Ayers’ Anatomy of a Crisis)** | 1. Pre-colonial era: traditional, wat-based, (males-only) education & informal oral traditions focusing on behaviour and morality (especially for females).  
2. (1863-1953): a French-oriented system (benign neglect, prepare for civil service, coordinate with wat schools).  
5. (April 1975-Dec. 1979): the Khmer Rouge’s regime’s attempt to create a new society that required citizens equipped only with minimal literacy and “practical learning”.  
8. (2001-2012): first democratic elections; merging into a period of vigorous reconstruction and reform significantly influenced by the international community (multilaterals and NGOs); highly publicised shift “from donorship to ownership”. |
**CAMBODIA: Influence is experienced differently at National (policy) level and Community (implementation) level**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Political system**       | ▪ Patrimonial system and persistent (violent) power struggle between and within parties. Gradual diminishment of political opposition and political space (~2005).  
▪ Weak rule of law.  
▪ Poor accountability & lack of transparency from those in power.  
▪ Inadequate pay for civil servants.  
▪ Abuse & capture of contractual arrangements by powerful patrons.  
▪ Education used as form of legitimation.  
▪ Non-MoEYS interest, involvement, & influence in education.  
▪ Fear culture.  
▪ Patronage, rather than merit-based system of appointment for positions of authority. |                                                                                                                                                           |
| **War (decades of fighting)** | ▪ Multiple external agenda and political systems imposed.  
▪ UNTAC largely failed to transition Cambodia to a peaceful state.                                                                                                                                 | ▪ Reduces trust.  
▪ Ambivalence toward government.                                                                                                                                 |
| **Genocide**               | ▪ Destruction of social fabric.  
▪ Practical legacy of limited formal education.  
▪ Trauma – individual and social.                                                                                                                                                                         | ▪ Issue of trust.  
▪ Short-term vs. long-term perspective on life (difficult to plan/think in long term; more immediate goals are priority).                                                                                   |
| **Identity**               | ▪ Cultural ambivalence & fractured identity (Arensen, 2007).  
▪ War with Thailand a result/example.  
▪ Animosity toward Vietnamese.  
▪ Foreign social media (Thailand, Korea) very influential on youth; youth and adults in conflict.                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                           |
| **The material world:**    |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                           |
| Poverty & economics        | ▪ Low tax base.  
▪ 50%+ below poverty line.  
▪ Most agrarian/subsistence.  
▪ Urban vs. rural gaps.  
▪ Child labour (highest in SEAsia).                                                                                                                                                               | ▪ Results in low enrolment as poor cannot afford school; girls more often withdrawn for labour; etc.  
▪ Reinforces social stratification and prevents genuine equality.                                                                                                                                     |
| **Gender**                 | ▪ Males valued more than females.  
▪ Sexual, moral, behavioural double-standard (*men like gold, women like cloth*).  
▪ *Chbab Srey* remains strongly influential.  
▪ Public statements about women (Edwards, 2008)                                                                                                                                                           | Negatively affects girls’ enrolment, retention, completion.                                                                                                     |
Appendix 7: Timeline of Major Events /Reform in Cambodian Education Sector

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>RGC Document / Policy / Concept</th>
<th>Supporting Agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7 January 1979</td>
<td>Liberation by VN followed by a decade of support by VN with aid assistance from Eastern bloc countries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1979</td>
<td>KPRP(^{49}) charges Pol Pot &amp; his Minister of Foreign affairs, Ieng Sary, with the murder of 3 million Cambodians and in absensia sentences them to death.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979 – 1986</td>
<td>Vietnam: 10-year education system ((4+3+3))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986-1996</td>
<td>11-year system ((5+3+3))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 to present</td>
<td>12-year system ((6+3+3))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-1989</td>
<td>Rebuilding primary education. Despite lack of aid resources this decade saw a remarkable growth from a zero base in primary school enrolments.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1981</td>
<td>College of Foreign Languages founded to train interpreters and translators needed to receive and manage int’l foreign assistance (Russian, German, VN, Spanish were taught).</td>
<td>Vietnam plus Eastern Bloc bilateral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989 (1 May)</td>
<td>RPK changes name of the country to State of Cambodia (from 1.5.1989); institutes new national anthem; reinstates Buddhism as national religion; creates a new national flag; adopts governing party name of “Cambodia People’s Party” (CPP).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1989</td>
<td>VN forces unilaterally withdraw from Cambodia.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>UN endorsed framework for comprehensive settlement in Cambodia.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>National Education for All (EFA) Conference held inside Cambodia</td>
<td>RGC / MoEYS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1991</td>
<td>Violent anti-corruption (re: sale of Ministry properties by officials) and anti-government demonstrations led by students leaves at least 14 students dead.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>UNTAC Military forces &amp; civilian forces arrive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Origins of decentralisation via CARERE project which morphed into SEILA project that ended in 2005.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Cluster School(^{50}) Pilot Programme begins</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>National Cluster School Committee established</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1993</td>
<td>Following some delay due to a dispute over results, general election in Cambodia results as a first step in “Interim (from 1.7.93) Joint Administration of the Provisional National Government” with a First (Rannaridh -FUNCIPEC) and Second (Hun Sen – CPP) Prime Minister under King Sihanouk.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Sept. 93</td>
<td>Adoption of revised Constitution by Constituent Assembly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Sept. 1993</td>
<td>UNTAC effectively ends involvement in Cambodia.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{49}\) Jennar calls it Peoples’ Republic of Cambodia (RPK = French acronym).

\(^{50}\) Cluster school system is defined as “an organisational means of coordinating central government support, strengthening school management, managing scarce school resources, increasing capacity of local staff and enhancing teaching & learning” (MoEYS 2000).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>RGC Document / Policy / Concept</th>
<th>Supporting Agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29 Oct. 93</td>
<td>Elected National Assembly establishes Royal Government of Cambodia (Jennar, p. 179)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>The National Program to Rehabilitate and Develop Cambodia. (Tokyo). First of 17 years of RGC-annual Donor coordination conferences (suspended in 2011).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Capacity Building for Education and Human Resources Sector Management</td>
<td>UNDP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Following a national seminar <strong>Education Investment Plan</strong> (1995-2000) approved by RGC then published by ADB, with 3 aims: 1. improve quality of basic education 2. increase access to basic education for girls &amp; minorities 3. strengthen government capacity for planning &amp; management.</td>
<td>ADB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Note:</strong> Focus is mainly on supply-side interventions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td><strong>Cluster School policy</strong> adopted by MoEYS &amp; has rapid implementation.</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>USAID begins major investment in education sector with Cambodia Assistance to Primary Education Project (CAPE).</td>
<td>USAID ($30 million)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td><strong>Cambodian Education Sector Strategy</strong></td>
<td>ADB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Introduction of mandatory retirement policies to accommodate spoils system for FUNCINPEC cadres seeking employment. Sparks major teacher shortages for next 15 years.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>▪ Fighting erupts on streets of the capital between political factions. ▪ USAID suspends and eventually terminates all assistance to Education Sector.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>MoEYS re-introduces direct appointment of teachers, called <strong>krui kij-sanaya</strong> or ‘contract teachers’.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>CARE-MoEYS complete first comprehensive <strong>study of Girls’ Education in Cambodia</strong></td>
<td>CARE / MoEYS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998-99</td>
<td><strong>EQIP</strong> (Education Quality Improvement Project) Pilot – getting cash directly to schools via school clusters.</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1999</td>
<td>Cambodia joins ASEAN.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2001</td>
<td>Planning commenced for <strong>Secondary Education Investment Program (SEIP)</strong> to commence high school expansion following the priority to primary education expansion in the previous decade.</td>
<td>ADB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999-2004</td>
<td><strong>EQIP Pilot project</strong> decentralisation to clusters and schools of funds planning and management (in Takeo, Kandal and Kampot only)</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2004</td>
<td><strong>School feeding programme</strong> initially piloted in three EQIP supported provinces, then spread to needy communities in other agency supported provinces</td>
<td>WFP/EQIP/UNICEF/KAPE/SCN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>RGC Document / Policy / Concept</td>
<td>Supporting Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Cambodia adopts CMDG <em>(Cambodia Millennium Development Goals)</em> (include 3/9 relating specifically to education).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td><strong>First Girls' Scholarship Programs</strong> begins</td>
<td>NGO Pilots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td><strong>EFA Country assessment report</strong> shows Cambodia won't reach EFA goals. Prompts soul-searching.</td>
<td>MoEYS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td><strong>SWAP (Sector Wide Approach)</strong> applied also to education sector.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td><strong>Government strategy for financing the education sector changed radically and positively at this point.</strong> Expenditure on education as percentage of GDP has basically risen since this time, though it remains lower (~1.9%) than regional average (3.6%) and developing country average (4.2%).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2000</td>
<td><strong>RGC (MoEYS) introduces PAP pilot (Priority Action Program)</strong> to improve budget execution &amp; timing with grants direct to schools to address demand-side issues in educational development:** • <em>After introduction of PAP, the government officially abolished informal payment from parents for gr. 1-6; and for gr. 1-9 much later.</em></td>
<td>ADB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>UNICEF-KAPE disseminates the first and only Repetition Study; recommends reconfiguring development aid from supply-side to more demand-side interventions. Provides empirical basis for PAP, Scholarship, and School Feeding Programs.</td>
<td>UNICEF/KAPE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td><strong>Policy on Early Childhood Education</strong></td>
<td>MoEYS / RGC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>PAP expanded to all 20 provinces and 4 municipalities. “It represents the RGC’s strategy to finance the primary component of ESP and achieve the EFA goals.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td><strong>First Child Friendly School Pilot begins as Tripartite Effort with MoEYS, UNICEF, &amp; KAPE</strong></td>
<td>UNICEF, KAPE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1, 2001</td>
<td>Law passed on election of Commune Councils for a 5-year term.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Education Sector Support Programme <em>(ESSP)</em> 2002-2008</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

51 Pellini thesis, p. 74
52 Pellini thesis, p. 88
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>RGC Document / Policy / Concept</th>
<th>Supporting Agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) commences coordinating donors with MoEYS in planning support to policy implementation</td>
<td>UNICEF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>NEP (NGO Education Partnership) is created &amp; becomes formal entity in early 2002&lt;sup&gt;53&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>MoEYS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2002</td>
<td>National Policy on Non-formal Education.</td>
<td>MoEYS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Education Sector Support Programme (ESSP) 2002-2008 complements ESP.</td>
<td>Coordinates all contributing donors &amp; NGOs around ESP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2002</td>
<td>Election for Commune Council members.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td><strong>EDUCATION FOR ALL NATIONAL PLAN 2003-2015</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-2011</td>
<td>Education Sector Development Programs (ESDP I and II) implement new priority to development of Secondary Education.</td>
<td>ADB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>USAID renews assistance to basic education for children gr. 1-9, through helping to develop competency-based, student-centred, life skills curriculum and to undertake related teacher training efforts (Cambodia Basic Education Project – CBE).</td>
<td>USAID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2011</td>
<td>Following establishment in 2003 of the ACC (Accreditation Committee of Cambodia), pressure began to build for the funding of the neglected Higher Education System to channel the growing output from the secondary schools. This led to the Higher Education Component of the CESSP (Cambodia Education Sector Support Project (2006-10)) followed by the large CHEQCIP (Cambodia Higher Education Quality and Capacity Improvement Project (2010-2015)).</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td><strong>Policy for Curriculum Development 2005-2009</strong> (to replace the core curriculum developed in 1996 which is “not adequate”).</td>
<td>USAID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec., 2004</td>
<td><strong>Policy and strategies on information and communication technology in Cambodia</strong></td>
<td>MoEYS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Southeast Asian Ministers for Education meet in Bangkok and agree to promote and develop CFS as national strategy.</td>
<td>SEAMEO / UNICEF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>53</sup> NEP was created to increase the efficiency of communication between the MoEYS and NGOs, and to promote the engagement of civil society in the sector-wide education reform process. NEP became a formal representative entity in early 2002 with the adoption of a charter, election of a board, and signing up of 17 initial member organizations. In 2008, the membership increased to 78 organisations. NEP has a permanent seat on the ESWG and was recognized by the MoEYS as an official partner representing NGOs working in the education sector.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005 SY</td>
<td>School Readiness Program (SRP&lt;sup&gt;5&lt;/sup&gt;) developed as a pilot program during the 2004-2005 school year (SY) in response to failure of ed. reforms to reduce the overall rate of student repetition in Grade 1. With the success of the pilot program indicated by a program evaluation in 2004-2005, the MoEYS decided to begin expanding the SRP&lt;sup&gt;5&lt;/sup&gt; pilot into a national program, scaling it up gradually throughout the country. The program has now been streamlined into the ongoing Child Friendly School Initiative,</td>
<td>UNICEF / SC-N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>Preparation of Revised National Curriculum (for grades 1-6) and development of “curriculum standards.”</td>
<td>USAID/RTI Support to PRD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>SEILA project ends – “it achieved administrative de-concentration but produced only a limited transfer of political power and decision-making authority to lower level authorities.”&lt;sup&gt;54&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>USAID/KAPE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2005         | ▪ Cambodia launched Basic Education initiative called ESCUP (Educational Support for Children of Underserved Populations).  
▪ First support for Child Friendly Secondary Schools. | USAID/KAPE                                             |
| 2005-2006    | Preparation of Revised National Curriculum (for grades 7-9). RTI also developed “achievement standards” against which to plan curriculum. | USAID funded, contracted out to RTI.                  |
| 2006         | New Basic Education Curriculum (Grade 1-9)                                                      | MoEYS / RGC                                           |
| 2006         | Curriculum Standards for Grades 3, 6, 9 (in preparation for inception of standardised testing).    | MoEYS / RGC                                           |
| 2006         | Teacher Training Curriculum for Primary Education and Early Childhood Education                   | MoEYS / RGC                                           |
| 2006         | Teacher Standards for Basic Education                                                           | MoEYS / RGC                                           |
| 2006         | Gender Policy                                                                                   | MoEYS / RGC                                           |
| 2006         | Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Plan in Education issued                                         | MoEYS / RGC                                           |
| 2007         | Education Law is announced                                                                       | RGC                                                   |
| 2007         | Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS) adopted & incorporated into curriculum (for age 5)   | MoEYS / RGC                                           |
| 2007         | Child Friendly School Policy                                                                     | MoEYS / RGC                                           |
| 2008         | Cambodia’s application for EFA Fast Track Initiative Catalytic Fund (FTI-CF) grant is approved in the amount of US$ 57.4 million. | WB/UNICEF/ESWG                                        |
| 2008         | Policy on Education for Children with Disabilities                                              | MoEYS / RGC                                           |
| 2008         | National Inter-Ministerial Early Childhood Care and                                             |                                                        |

<sup>54</sup> Pellini thesis, p.78
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Sub-decree on <strong>Teacher Professional Code</strong> issued.</td>
<td>MoEYS / RGC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>ELDS drafted for ages 3-4.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Gender Mainstreaming officially commences in MoEYS with inception of dedicated working group.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td><strong>Affirmative action</strong> by MoEYS to increase female participation in education led to an increased</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>percentage of female teacher trainees (51.9% of the total teacher trainees) (as reported in UNESCO,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2010a (source = the Inspector General and Gender Focal Point, MoEYS, December 2008)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>USAID funds major expansion of support to Child Friendly Secondary Schools and Work-force Readiness</td>
<td>USAID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skills Training (Life Skills) (cf. <strong>Improved Basic Education in Cambodia Project,</strong> $10,000,000)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td><strong>ESP (2009-2013)</strong> first plan since 2006, following transition to direct MoEYS control.</td>
<td>Combined donors through ESWG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st July, 2010</td>
<td><strong>Policy on research development in the education sector</strong></td>
<td>MoEYS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-15</td>
<td><strong>CHEQCIP</strong> (Cambodia Higher Education Quality and Capacity Improvement Project (2010-2015) largest</td>
<td>WB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>international investment ever in Cambodian higher education, commences in 2010.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 2011</td>
<td>▶ Revised Child Friendly Schools Policy (Draft)</td>
<td>UNICEF sponsored the [Canadian] TA for this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▶ Revised Curriculum Policy (Draft)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2011</td>
<td><strong>Inclusive Education</strong> – curriculum for Teacher Training Centres being drafted as of July 2011.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July, 2011</td>
<td><strong>Guidelines produced for multi-level classroom instruction.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Sept. 2011</td>
<td>The Education for All – Fast Track Initiative officially becomes the <strong>Global Partnership for Education</strong></td>
<td>World Bank / UN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with an announcement and unveiling at the United Nations General Assembly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-2017</td>
<td>TA 2011 commences planning ESDP III to support secondary education development over the next five</td>
<td>ADB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>years.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 8: Percentage of Female Staff in MoEYS by Position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POSITION</th>
<th>Total No.</th>
<th>No. Women</th>
<th>% women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minister</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary of State</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under Secretary of State</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director General</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Inspector</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rector</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice- Director General</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice- General Inspector</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Rector</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Department</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspector</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Institute</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Center</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice- Director of Department</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Inspector</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Dean</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Director of Institute</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Director of Center</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Administration</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of municipal/provincial Ed.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Office Central Education</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of central pre-school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Director of municipal/provincial Ed.</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Chief Office Central Education</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Department</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Head of Department</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POSITION</td>
<td>Total No.</td>
<td>No. Women</td>
<td>% women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Director of central pre-school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Office provincial Education</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Chief Office municipal/provincial Ed.</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Office District Education</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Chief Office District Education</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official of Administration Management</td>
<td>702</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official of Admin. Management (b)</td>
<td>959</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>2117</td>
<td>704</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official of Admin. Management (d)</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Regional Pedagogical Center</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Dir. of Regional Pedagogical Center</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Municipal/Prov. Teacher Training Center (TTC)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Resource Center</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice- Director of Municipal/Provincial TTC</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Inspector</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Inspector</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher of Higher Education</td>
<td>853</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Upper Secondary School</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Director of Upper Secondary School</td>
<td>829</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Secondary School Teacher</td>
<td>6533</td>
<td>1873</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Lower Secondary School</td>
<td>1075</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Director of Lower Secondary School</td>
<td>798</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Secondary School Teacher</td>
<td>31197</td>
<td>11704</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Primary School</td>
<td>5374</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice- Director of Primary School</td>
<td>3552</td>
<td>695</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School Teacher</td>
<td>48380</td>
<td>23682</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Pre-School</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Director of Pre-School</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-School Teacher</td>
<td>2374</td>
<td>2337</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Appendix 9: National-level Frame for Education Sector**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>National-level frame for education sector</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual Education Congress</strong></td>
<td>Originally conceived of as an internal reporting mechanism for MoEYS, has recently evolved into a joint review of progress against ESP goals, with input by MoEYS and NGOs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Education Sector Working Group (ESWG)** | Comprised of representatives from the donor sector, including UN agencies, bilateral donors, development banks and NGOs, meets independently of the RGC to take a common position on dialogue with Government and MOEYS on the ESSP. ESWG representatives participate in the (quasi)monthly Consultative Meeting chaired by MoEYS. The purpose of this meeting is “strategic dialogue, sharing information on policy, strategy and program priorities, forward planning and coordination”.
| **Joint Technical Working Group on Education (JTWG-Ed.)** | A forum for regular policy dialogues and coordination between the RGC and donors/NGOs, |
| **Aid Effectiveness Adviser** | A Technical Advisor position jointly funded by multiple donor partners to assist MoEYS and ESWG in translating Aid Effectiveness agendas into concrete actions. |
| **Consultative Group (CG)** | A total of eight Consultative Group meetings were conducted during 1996-2006, the first five chaired by the World Bank and the last three co-chaired by World Bank and the RGC. As per the World Bank’s website: “Co-chaired by the Royal Government of Cambodia and the World Bank, the CG is a group of [bilateral] donors who meet annually with the Government to discuss issues of development, growth and poverty reduction, and reform.” The primary outcome of each CG is a pledge by bilateral donors in response to the Government’s request for aid for the coming year – for the past several years, aid pledges have amounted to around 1 billion USD. Traditionally, NGOs produced sectoral-specific “Position Papers” for the annual CG meeting, in which NGOs provided their perspective on the Government’s progress against national aims for various sectors, education included. |
| **Cambodia Development Cooperation Forum (CDCF)** | In 2006, the RGC transformed the CG into the Cambodia Development Cooperation Forum and assumed greater ownership of the process. Three CDCF events have been held: without warning, the Prime Minister announced in February 2012 that the CDCF would be suspended until 2014, as the government preferred to make arrangement with individual donors (“Cambodia Development Cooperation Forum to resume in 2014,” 2012). Among Western donor agencies, it is widely believed that this shift is a direct result of Asian donor resources/interests – namely China. |
| **Global Monitoring Report** | In addition, as an official participant in the global EFA and MDG campaigns, Cambodia is obligated to report periodically to the UN against its related goals. Cambodia has reported five times on the MDG; and nearly every year since 2002 for the EFA Global Monitoring Report. |
Appendix 10: Overview of Practice Against 6 Dimensions of CFS

This inquiry was not intended as an evaluation into the quality of implementation of CFS in Cambodia against globally defined standards; rather, it sought to understand how practitioners understand CFS, and how they implement it, and to begin answering the question of why practice occurs as it does. This Annex, then, is a brief report of observations of practice against the six dimensions of CFS.

DIMENSION 1: ALL CHILDREN HAVE ACCESS TO SCHOOLING

The Khmer version of the Dimension One summary phrase is: kohmahr tieng ah baan chol rien or, literally, all children can enter school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>DETAILED OBSERVATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Getting girls to school / Keeping girls in school | • Limited to focus on [getting] girls to school / [keeping] girls in school.  
• There was some discussion about “poverty” as a factor affecting attendance (usually arising in the context of talk about scholarships offered by external sources). |
| Disability                                  | • At the research site, little/no attention was given to disability because “we don’t have that here.” That is, authorities and officials denied the presence of disability in their catchment area.  
• Disability is largely defined/perceived in terms of physical issues (specifically – “blind” and “crippled”) with virtually no mention of cognitive impairment.  
• As for making infrastructure accessible to disabled children, the most common effort is concrete ramps up to a classroom block porch –but little else. For instance, toilets would be very difficult for people with mobility challenges to access because they are often set quite a distance from classrooms and to get there requires movement over uneven, unpaved ground (in some cases, walking on the edge of a pond), steps up to the cubicle, and very little room to move within the cubicle.  
• In the few instances where teachers/administrators did admit the need to accommodate some students who were “disabled” they said they told kids with sight problems and with hearing problems to sit in the front row so they could see/hear better. |
| Religion                                    | • Teacher FGD referred to the fact that being inclusive prohibits discrimination against people with “different religion” (ie. other than Buddhism). However, textbooks are basically devoid of representations of “other” religions (with one exception – a page where major world religions are presented). Where teachers acknowledged other religions they talked of “Cham going to school”. |
| Inclusion as barrier to quality             | • Universal access (“collect all”) is not regarded by all teachers as something positive – because it means everyone can come to school, therefore lots of students will perform poorly as many who do come are not smart, don’t want to be there, are disruptive to the class, and so forth. |
### DIMENSION 2: EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING

The Dimension 2 summary statement in Khmer is: *ka-seksar prokap dowee prosetuphi* which literally means *study [together with] effectiveness*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>DETAILED OBSERVATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Teaching & learning | - Generally, amongst all stakeholders, there is considerably more emphasis on teaching than on learning – teachers regard themselves as transmitters of information and knowledge.  
- Teachers are reluctant to take responsibility for what hearer/s (“learners”) do with that information.  
- Teachers tend to blame students for failure to learn, rather than taking responsibility for the teaching/learning process. (In the same way, MoEYS at national level blames provincial and district-level staff for non-performance.)  
- Teachers seem more concerned about being perceived as “good teachers” by observers (DTMT, research team), than on teaching well. |
| Pedagogy | - Teachers perceive student-centred learning to be much easier, less physically strenuous, less demanding of teachers than teacher-centred instruction.  
- Dominance of whole class teaching; with little or no attention to individual learner differences and needs.  
- Cued elicitation and ritualised participation strategies employed regularly.  
- Strongly reiterative rather than progressive lessons. |
| Type of information / knowledge | - Teachers emphasise relaying contents (information) of textbook to students; not stimulating critical thinking capacity or creativity.  
- World Bank achievement study on math showed the lowest average was for telling time and highest was for ‘equal parts & measures’ “which suggests more difficulty in application skills than with knowledge and comprehension.” (Bernard, 2008)  
- Heavy emphasis on prepositional knowledge, to near-exclusion of personal and procedural knowledge. |
| Question forms | - Questions from teachers to students seldom deviate from the textbook and are concerned primarily with facts and information (in contrast to concepts and analysis); questions to teachers from students are rare and when they occur, tend to focus on clarification of task instructions.  
- Students rarely ask questions of teachers; when they do, it tends to relate to clarification of instructions rather than actual course content. |
| Relevance/life links | - Textbook information is rarely linked (by teachers or students) to the local context.  
- Textbook information is rarely applied to the daily lives of students.  
- Textbooks are not suitable for indigenous ethnic minorities as the norm in the books is lowland Cambodia and Khmer. |
| Assessment | - Student/learning assessment appears to be arbitrary, rather than systematic or standards-based.  
- Further, it is purely test-based in classes observed during this study.  
- Students are ranked monthly according to their grade in the class, with #1 as the highest scoring student. All students are keenly aware of their rank. Many who are ranked in the bottom half of the class said it was discouraging to have a high number. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>DETAILED OBSERVATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Preparation time      | - Teachers spend little time on lesson preparation (reportedly because they are too busy with domestic chores, income-earning activities, and there is no electricity which makes it difficult to work in the evenings.  
  - Several teachers said preparation and lesson plans were unnecessary because they had taught the class/subject before. |
| Corporal punishment   | - Teachers express is a significant degree of ambivalence about using corporal punishment to enhance learning.  
  - Teachers generally are in favour of corporal punishment.  
  - Few teachers had alternative management skills and felt unable to manage their class well. |
| Class management      | - Teachers tend to use negative reinforcement to manage individual students and classrooms.  
  - Shame and blame are two popular techniques for managing student behaviour. |
| Affirmation and reinforcement | - Teachers tend to use punitive rather than positive affirmation of student work and response.  
  - When praise is utilised, it tends to be very general rather than specific. |
| Group work            | - Default method, used with minimal instruction to or management of group processes.  
  - Reliance on strong students to pull along weak students.  
  - Frequently, 1-2 students in each group completed the task without involvement from other group members. |
| Slow Learners         | - Little appreciation for different kinds of things that might affect student capacity and willingness to learn (ie. physiological, emotional, etc.).  
  - Treated as a whole group; no individualised attention. |
| Materials             | - Teachers, and administrators, tend to equate CFS with “materials”: with the corollary being – therefore, if there are no materials there can be no Child Friendly teaching.  
  - No electricity; no computer; few extra-curricular activities. |
| Classroom decorations | - Teachers and students like having “decorations” displayed on classroom walls and see the main purpose as being “to make children feel good, /happy”. Thus they sometimes include colourful advertisements.  
  - Only occasionally, teachers to make reference to items displayed in their classrooms.  
  - Noticeable uniformity across all classrooms regardless of grade, and across schools in the Cluster. Not necessarily age-appropriate. |
| Teaching techniques   | - Multiple teaching techniques included as part of the MoEYS guide books for ETL were not used by teachers though all had received training on them. Some examples are: classroom layout plans, simplified Bloom’s Taxonomy, writing tasks, student portfolios, real-time text, etc. |
| Sustainability        | - Most of the creative work supported by NGOs (such as home visits to teach “slow learners”, annual market days, life-skills) ceases when the financial resources stop.  
  - So does maintenance, and application, of statistical records. |
**DIMENSION 3: CHILD HEALTH, SAFETY, PROTECTION.**

The Khmer rendering of CFS’s third Dimension is *sokuphiep sovataphiep neung ka-kaphia kokmahr*, or literally health, security, and protection to children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>DETAILED OBSERVATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Environment / school yard    | - Essentially concerned with a “clean environment” (read: sweeping school yard & classrooms) and “hygiene” (read: having a well, and having a toilet block).  
- Though school yards were often very clean of even leaves and branches, behind school buildings in several cluster schools there were piles of candy wrappers and other garbage. |
| Safety issues                | - “Safety” as an element in Dimension 3 did not arise frequently and when it did was discussed in terms of “vehicles” and “road safety” (though no schools researched were located in areas with many vehicles other than motorcycles).  
- Administrators and teachers expressed concern about vehicular traffic near the school, and the need for posting monitors when school lets out so that children are not injured by passing motorists.  
- Schools are not particularly safe places for children: several schools had unfenced ponds adjacent to or on their property, many classrooms had piles of broken desks and blackboards in a back corner, many school yards had small construction projects underway, playground equipment was often broken, etc. |
| Hygiene                      | - Attention to issues of “hygiene” (food preparation or preservation) and “health” (nutritional content of food, packaging of candies that resemble alcohol or cigarettes) concerns were not applied to the ubiquitous snack sellers at any schoolyard.  
- All schools visited had wells and pumps on the grounds; but we were unable to observe whether or not all were in functioning order.  
- All schools had toilet blocks. However, in some cases they were prohibitively far from the classrooms, some were padlocked (to keep them clean), some had not been cleaned for quite some time and were filthy, at one school the roof had broken was dangling into the toilet block. At Sala Phum, one toilet block was located on the far side of an unfenced pond, necessitating a walk along the steep lip of the pond. |
| Child protection             | - At the research site, there was little discussion about “child protection”  
- There was unanimous denial of any problems of sexual abuse or misconduct (or even the potential of such issues arising) at all schools visited – “that does not happen in our school.”  
- However sexual molestation was raised as potential problem that might for girls occur on way to/from school (though no one expressed concern that teachers might abuse students), in discussion with parents and teachers. |
| Violence                     | - Although the MoEYS produced a guidebook for Dimension 3 entitled *Preventing violence against children* which identifies three kinds of possible violence against children as physical, emotional (including bullying), and sexual harassment and abuse – none of these points surfaced in discussion with teachers and administrators. |
DIMENSION 4: GENDER SENSIVITY, RESPONSIVENESS.

In Khmer, Dimension 4 reads Kar-chelaweetop te neung jendah or literally answer to/respond to gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>DETAILED OBSERVATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Gender as girl students      | ▪ Focus on “gender” has essentially been simplified to refer to “girls” and “equal numbers of boys and girls.”  
▪ Focus is almost exclusively on students and not applied to administrative functions or central level of MoEYS.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Male teachers, female students (and vice versa) | ▪ Appears to be limited sensitivity among male teachers for differing needs that boys/girls may have in a learning setting – female teachers recognised both that that teaching about ‘sex’, or other “taboo” subjects, may require dividing a class into same-sex groups, and that girls might be afraid/embarrassed to approach male teachers to discuss their private or family lives.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Gender stereotyping          | ▪ Strong stereotyping along the lines of traditional gender roles occurs in numerous ways:  
- textbook illustrations,  
- textbook content (ie. focus on male historical authority figures; when rendering families, most often fathers are in the role of income earners or professionals and mothers are doing domestic tasks such as cooking or caring for a family member),  
- assignment of chores to students (boys carry water, girls sweep the classroom),  
- teacher voice modulation and facilitation of participation,  
- teacher acceptance/encouragement of unruly behaviour from boys but not girls,  
- children’s expressions of future career paths did not deviate much from traditional (stereotypical) roles for females and males.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
### Dimension 5: Participation by Children, Families, and Communities

The Khmer translation of Dimension 5 is *Kar-cholruam robah kokhmahr kruasar neung sahakum*, literally participation of children, family, and community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>DETAILED OBSERVATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Familiarity with “CFS”        | • Very few participants in parent/caregiver interviews and focus group discussions had heard of the term “Child Friendly School”.  
• Teachers indicated that they had not shared with parents about CFS because “they had not been instructed by the MoEYS to tell them about it.”  
• While one of almost all parent dyads know the name of their child’s teacher, parents seldom communicated with the teacher (“we don’t have time”, “we don’t know what to say,” “we are shy”), rarely responded in writing to the child’s progress book, did not visit the classroom.  
• Only a few had ever been invited to or attended any meeting at the school.  
• Parents said they feel stupid and don’t want to talk to teachers because the teacher makes them feel bad.  
• Teachers are not very proactive about soliciting parent participation in school events, or even to discuss child progress. Most communication is done through the official Progress Report Book.  
• School Committees are comprised mostly of males.  
• Members don’t necessarily have children of their own attending the school.  
• There is no set limit to how length of term for membership.  
• Committees focus primarily on raising money and repairing or erecting physical infrastructure. This “material preoccupation” was also observed by Pellini (2007).  
• “School Committee” is an official feature of CFS under Dimension 5. The school Director sees main purpose of this Committee as fund-raising to build infrastructure (ie. walls, buildings).  
• Committee members themselves see another important function as practical service (such as repairing broken furniture or constructing a fence) rather than strategic function (the purpose as stated by MoEYS).  
• Committee did not perform any planning or management function/s.  
• At Sala Phum there was a CC organisational chart on the office wall (and a Girls Committee chart) designating a leader and students; however, few students interviewed were aware of the CC and none had participated in any CC meetings.  
• Director sees purpose as keeping away gangs, keeping school yard neat and tidy, and lead each other to study (these are not the aims as per the MOEYS guide book).  
• At the main Cluster school, purpose of the CC was to organise logistics for various prescribed school events.  
• In the research site, local wats were not actively involved with schools.  
• Director’s idea of networking was to ask the wat and the Christian orphanage for cutlery for the school kitchen.  
• Village chief/s and others reported being actively involved in annual campaign to enrol children at the start of each school year. |

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**DIMENSION 6: MOEYS SUPPORT**

In Khmer language, Dimension 6 is rendered *ka-owamtro kamvitee pi pra-poan apbrum* which literally means support the programme from education system.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>DETAILED OBSERVATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchical,</td>
<td>- The MoEYS is centralised and top-down: schools are informed rather than consulted.</td>
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<tr>
<td>centralised system</td>
<td>- Individual schools have little/no influence in their own budgeting and administration. For instance, a rural school’s detailed annual budget (i.e. including line items and amount per line item) is allocated by higher authorities. A school director in Seksa Cluster summarised: “We cannot decide about money: we must report according to the line they give us.”</td>
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<td>Ruling by fear</td>
<td>- The Ministry is feared (IIEP, 2011) and policies, directives, instructions from the Ministry are regarded as something to be obeyed without question, rather than seen as a source of support. When asked about “why” teachers often shrugged and said “the Ministry…”.</td>
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<td>Monitoring system</td>
<td>- The CFS monitoring system is elaborate, but perhaps ineffectual because it “measures the wrong things” (Courtney, 2008). A teacher can get an excellent score against the MoEYS checklist, or a school can be rated in the top tier, and still not be philosophically, fundamentally “child friendly”.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- The purpose of DTMT is regarded by teachers as “to correct us/ to tell us our mistakes” – this negative perspective is not likely to engender a spirit of cooperative learning among educational professionals.</td>
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<td>- DTMT follows a strict chain of command; they do not interact with teachers but rather leave their checklist report of teacher quality with the Director who is then to discuss it with the teacher/s.</td>
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<td>Professional</td>
<td>- In-service training sporadic: not all schools in the cluster had had training in CFS.</td>
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<td>development</td>
<td>- Cascading training model, preferred by MoEYS, is ineffective in Cambodia context as it is too sporadic, does not include follow-up, and is highly didactic.</td>
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<td>- Quality and content of instruction is highly dependent upon the identity of international donors who assist.</td>
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<td>Financial support</td>
<td>- National MoEYS budget allocation not increasing annually, and declining in recent years. Budget does not keep up with inflation.</td>
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<td>- MoEYS budget under-expenditure occurs every year.</td>
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<td>- Teacher salaries remain inadequate – not a living wage.</td>
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<td>- Budget from central MoEYS is always slow to arrive to schools – and sometimes never does. Thus, Administrators report sometimes taking personal loans to get work done.</td>
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<td>Corruption</td>
<td>- Teachers report being required to pay a small sum in order to receive their salary each month.</td>
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<td>- Teachers reported buying their way into teaching positions.</td>
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<td>- <em>Rien kuar</em>, the “shadow education system” props up corruption and further impoverishes families or prevents participation at all.</td>
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<td>- Student cheating on national exams is rampant.</td>
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### Appendix 11: Demonstrating Local response – by Type of Response

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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</table>
| **Deployment** | To be “utilized or arranged for deliberate purpose.” | - Teachers see CFS as a set of activities rather than an approach.  
- Lesson plans are seldom prepared; kept for a long time; pulled out when required by a supervisor.  
- Regular collection of anthropometric data but no utilization.  
- Pictures, posters, decorations on the classroom walls.  
- Cans filled with sticks and pebbles to be used for math (and other) games, but never used.  
- Clean school yard (in the front – back of classrooms deep with garbage).  
- Statistical charts and committee charts on office walls (outdated information, information not applied to practice, committees not operational).  
- Playground equipment equated with “CFS” though often rusted and broken and unusable. |
| **Incorporation** | “To work into something already existent so as to form an indistinguishable whole” (or “business as usual”) | - Student participation – minimal, and not self-directed.  
- Group work (genuine collective activity is limited; little group management or instruction; often a single student does the work; minimal dialogue in groups)  
- Slow learners (all teachers aware; regarded half the class as ‘slow’; did/could not distinguish causes of ‘slow’; did not provide individualised instruction; response was to set aside a day to repeat lessons for whole class).  
- Health and safety/security concepts are seen simply as school breakfast, toilets, clean water, traffic safety. (No notice of broken equipment on playground and desks in classrooms, or open ponds on the school property. |
| **Adaptation** | Intentional change by practitioners of the foreign concept to suit their (local) situation (soft version of “localisation”). | - Child friendly as happy children does not comply with the essential meaning of originators of CFS.  
- School Support Committee (new name, but traditional use of traditional committee to assist with material support).  
- Student-centred learning: conflated with group work; defined as students doing more than teachers and thus easier for teachers; students active in reading out from textbook but not actually interacting with materials and content.  
- Work of DTMT (clear example of hierarchy, of punitive approach to behaviour rather than positive and encouraging approach. |
| **Contestation** | When education stakeholders acknowledge and pay | - Denial of any issues relating to security, violence (bullying, etc.), sexual harassment, etc. because we are gentle and well-behaved, traditional people.  
- Hierarchical structure and limiting opportunity for subordinates to feedback to superiors all along the chain. |
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|             | lip-service to an idea, but do not actually engage because they are, fundamentally, opposed to the idea. | - Notions of “Inclusiveness,” “equality,” “transparency” are contested: Textbooks are not supportive of idea of “inclusiveness” – only Buddhism featured as legitimate religion in textbooks. Indigenous ethnic minorities are caricatured. No way for physically dis-abled children to access school facilities (token ramps).  
- Corporal punishment still employed.  
- Interactive pedagogy contested because it runs counter to local values of harmony and order.  
- Teachers (and parents) see child rights as disempowering for them, and as increasing unruly and disrespectful behaviour in students.  
- Teachers generally ignore the pedagogical and management techniques outlined in the MoEYS guide books. |
| Resistance  | Refusal to accept or implement global norms. Resistance may be explicit/tacit; intentional/ reflexive (i.e. a sub-conscious response). | - Happens perhaps more clearly at the central level: for instance, recent rejection of reading method, ignorance of concept of education for sustainable development, and intentionally limited efforts to address socio-cultural barriers to gender equality (partly by insistent focus on technical information about rights). |