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**DRAFT**

**Educational Policy Trajectories in an Era of Globalisation:**

**Singapore and Cambodia**

**Charlene Tan**

**Abstract**

This paper explores the educational policy trajectories of Singapore and Cambodia in an era of globalisation. Drawing upon Johnson (2006)’s five metaphors to describe the historical and political forces that shape educational policy trajectories, the paper argues that Cambodia’s educational policy trajectory is characterised by the ‘politics of compelling’ as Cambodia is obligated to accept and implement policy reforms as part of the conditions for foreign aid. In contrast, Singapore’s situation is more akin to the ‘politics of selling’ as it is controlled by a strong state that is keen to adapt pro-globalisation educational policies but at its own terms. The paper points out the common challenge for Singapore and Cambodia to shift from a traditional teacher-centred textbook-based approach to a student-centred ICT-based approach in a globalised world. The last section of this paper recommends that this challenge can be overcome if Singapore and Cambodia move to the ‘politics of gelling’ where a new agenda for education combining foreign and indigenous sources of knowledge involving various interest groups can be set.

**Introduction**

Policy borrowing takes place within a continuum of educational transfer, from ‘imposed educational transfer’ at one end, to voluntary adoption of the foreign examples at the other (Phillps and Ochs 2004, as cited in Johnson 2006). In an era of globalisation, countries that share common political-historical experiences have borrowed similar educational policies but developed in different directions with different outcomes. This paper adopts Johnson (2006)’s five metaphors to describe the historical and political forces or relations that have shaped educational policy trajectories of Singapore and Cambodia: telling, rebelling, compelling, selling, and gelling (see figure 1). This framework is helpful for us to understand the phenomena of educational borrowing and transfer especially in an age of globalisation.

The first metaphor is the ‘politics of telling’ which parallels Phillips and Ochs (2004)’s idea of imposed educational transfer. It usually takes place during the colonial period where the colonial powers determine the educational policies of the occupied territories. The ‘politics of rebelling’ often takes place in postcolonial relationships, ranging from policy review and renewal to complete rejection. The next metaphor, the ‘politics of compelling’, is more appropriate for heavily indebted poor countries caught in a neo-colonial context, where they have to negotiate with constraint their relationship with the international donor community. The fourth metaphor is the ‘politics of selling’ which describes developing countries that have more control over their policy environments. These countries are able to adapt selected educational policies in a
globalised world to promote national economic growth and global competitiveness. Finally, the ‘politics of gelling’ refers to a crystallisation of indigenous and foreign sources of knowledge where a new economy of knowledge is created and strengthened. This metaphor involves a wider set of interest groups such as the government, industry and educational institutions who set new agendas for education by combining the global and local. Johnson (2006) notes that the metaphors are intricately bound and not all the metaphors are present in all developing countries. In cases where the metaphors are present, their existence influences the shaping of educational policy in different ways. As we shall see, this is true in the case of Singapore and Cambodia.

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 1: Trajectories of educational change and policy transfer**  
*Source: Johnson (2006)*

**Historical Overview of Educational Policy Trajectories in Singapore and Cambodia: The Politics of Telling and Rebelling**

Both Singapore and Cambodia underwent the politics of telling and rebelling during the colonial and post-colonial period. Singapore was founded as a British trading post and colony in 1819 and was granted self-government in 1959. It was briefly occupied by the Japanese from 1942 to 1945 when the British lost the war to the Japanese. After a short-lived union with Malaysia in 1963, it was separated to become a sovereign state in 1965. During the period of colonisation, the British transplanted metropolitan models and practices into Singapore to deepen Singapore’s integration into Britain’s economic empire (Gopinathan 2001). English-medium Christian schools were set up for Singaporeans to learn the English language and British history. But only a small group of Singaporeans were educated in these schools as the British preferred to leave the indigenous language-medium schools to the responsibilities of the ethnic communities. Under the Japanese occupation, Singaporeans were mandated to learn the Japanese language and curriculum transported from Japan. Likewise in Cambodia, imposed educational transfer took place under the French from 1863 to 1953 (and briefly under the Japanese from 1941 to 1945). The colonial powers introduced French-oriented curriculum and set up educational institutions such as the French-language School of the Protectorate, a college for interpreters, and a few French-language primary schools (Clayton 1995). As in the case in Singapore, only a select group of Cambodians received French education while the majority remained uneducated or attended religious schools taught by Buddhist monks.

The politics of telling was replaced by the politics of rebelling in the postcolonial period where policy review and rejection were evident in Singapore and Cambodia. From 1965, the ruling People’s Action Party government, under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew, put in place a series of educational policies to promote and sustain national economic development. While there was a continuation of educational policies introduced by the British, these policies were reviewed and revised to suit the economic, social and political needs of Singapore. For example,
while the Singapore government continued with using English as the lingua franca, it rejected monolingualism by promoting the bilingual policy that required all students learn English as well as a ‘mother-tongue language’, namely Mandarin (Putonghua) for the Chinese, Malay for the Malays and Tamil for the Indians. Rebelling against the British government’s policy of privileging English-medium Christian schools, the Singapore government introduced a uniform curriculum for all students, with a set of locally produced textbooks, and civics and moral education to foster a common Singaporean identity. In the case of Cambodia, King Sihanouk took over from the French in the middle of the twentieth century and embarked on an ambitious plan to build many schools and universities. While he retained some aspects of the French curriculum in his educational reforms, he also rebelled by attempting to erase the colonial mentality and instil a sense of national pride by emphasising Cambodian history, culture, literature, civic and moral instruction (Tan 2008a).

**Educational Policy Trajectories in Singapore and Cambodia in a Globalised World: The Politics of Selling and Compelling**

A globalised world witnesses the acceleration of cross-border flows and inter-connectedness of capital, goods, services, people and ideas (Green 2007). Some major effects of globalisation, though vary widely from country to country, include internationalisation, denationalisation of economies, weakening of the nation state, and commodification of education (Ohmae 1995; Green 2007; Gopinathan 2007). Aware of the value of intellectual capital in a globalised economy, many states are attempting to upgrade their human capital to stay ahead of their competitors. Among the traits of a globalised citizen are linguistic abilities, cross-cultural sensitivities, critical and creative thinking, problem-solving, innovation, enterprise, and computer literacy skills. Convergent education reforms across countries include the trend towards decentralisation; the promotion of Information and Communication Technology (ICT); and the emphasis on thinking skills and student-centred learning (e.g. see Green 1999; Marginson 1999; Angus 2004; Tan and Ng 2007). Gopinathan (2007, 56) notes that “all reform proposals stress the need for greater attention to process, higher order thinking skills, better utilisation of technology in education, changes to assessment, greater devolution of power to principals, etc”.

In the case of Singapore and Cambodia, both countries adopt similar pro-globalisation educational policies, but they are shaped by different educational policy trajectories and led to different outcomes.

**Singapore**

Riding on the waves of globalisation, Singapore was able to transit from the politics of rebelling to the politics of selling. The politics of selling is evident in the educational reforms introduced by the Singapore government to enhance the young nation’s economic growth and global competitiveness. Singapore illustrates a post-colonial state that has firm control over its policy environments and is in the market to capitalise on neo-liberal educational policies and practices. These reforms were launched under the ‘Thinking Schools, Learning Nation’ vision since 1997. This vision aims to develop creative thinking skills, a lifelong passion for learning and nationalistic commitment in the young. Explaining the idea of ‘thinking schools’, the former Prime Minister, of Singapore, Goh Chok Tong, stated that Singapore schools must nurture thinking to keep Singapore vibrant and successful in an age of globalisation. He pointed out that
‘thinking schools’ are “the crucibles for questioning and searching, within and outside the classroom, to forge this passion for learning among our young” (Goh 1997). In a knowledge economy, he noted, students need to have a passion for learning, and not just study for the sake of getting good grades in their examinations. Admitting that this passion is generally lacking among students in Singapore, he cautioned that their knowledge would be fragile unless they had the desire and aptitude to continue discovering new knowledge after they graduate. This vision is driven by an educational paradigm known as an Ability-Driven Education which was officially introduced in 1999. This paradigm aims to identify and develop the talents and abilities of every child to the maximum, whether the talent is in the intellect, arts, sports, or community endeavours. Through such a paradigm, the Ministry of Education (MOE) hopes to inculcate in the students the conviction of being committed to the nation and contributing their talents for the good of the society. The education policy initiatives under the ‘Thinking Schools, Learning Nation’ vision implement educational policy initiatives in the following three main areas: decentralisation at the school level; Information and Communication Technology (ICT); and student-centred pedagogy.

First, the Singapore government adopts decentralisation by moving towards a devolved environment where there is less centralised control and more freedom and flexibility given to local authorities in Singapore (Tan and Ng 2007). No longer subscribing to ‘one-size-fits-all’ decisions made by the MOE for all schools in Singapore, schools are now much more active in decision-making for themselves. At the level of headquarters and schools, there is greater democratic participation as Singapore schools have a greater power than before in shaping the local education landscape. Singapore schools are now responsible to transform themselves by making themselves different from one another, improving themselves and competing with one another. Schools are striving to be more innovative in providing a variety of education opportunities and choices to the students such as through their niche programmes and innovative projects. Decentralisation is also introduced to strengthen local culture, business and community through the local school’s programmes and activities. MOE has encouraged schools to be part of the community and to partner with stakeholders in education such as the local business and community through student-initiated community-based projects and service learning. The phenomenon of marketisation in education is also evident in the Singapore education system. This not only leads to the setting up of private schools and the influx of international students, but also a rationalisation of resource allocation and utilisation in existing schools to compete in the market.

Secondly, ICT is promoted through three ‘Masterplan for ICT in Education’ since 1997. All the three plans serve to “enrich and transform the learning environments of our students and equip them with the critical competencies and dispositions to succeed in a knowledge economy” (MOE 2008). The first Masterplan for ICT in Education (1997-2002) focused on providing basic ICT infrastructure and enabling teachers to possess an elementary level of ICT integration competency. The second Masterplan for ICT in Education (2003-2008) aimed to strengthen the integration of ICT into the curriculum, establish the baseline ICT standards for students, and encourage innovative use of ICT. The latest Masterplan for ICT in Education (2009-2014) aims to achieve the following: strengthen integration of ICT into curriculum, pedagogy and assessment to enhance learning and develop competencies for the 21st century such as IT skills, and the ability to communicate persuasively and collaborate effectively; provide differentiated professional development that is more practice-based and models how ICT can be effectively used to help students learn better; improve the sharing of best practices and successful
innovations; and enhance ICT provisions in schools to support the implementation of mp3 (MOE 2008).

Thirdly, there is an emphasis on moving from teacher-centred to student-centred pedagogy. The school curriculum, assessment and pedagogy have changed to encourage higher-order thinking and independent learning. Teachers are exalted to expand their repertoire of teaching and learning strategies under the Teach Less, Learn More (TLLM) initiative so as to encourage their students to learn more actively and independently beyond the formal curriculum. The objective of TLLM is for teachers to teach better by engaging the students and preparing them for life, rather than merely teaching more for tests and examinations. Knowing that this is possible only if teachers have more time to reflect, MOE has introduced a number of ways to free up more time for teachers. These include allowing schools to hire more support staff such as part-time teachers, and reducing the content in the curriculum so that teachers have space to make learning more engaging and effective. The desired outcome is for students to have less to study and more time to explore areas of learning in which they are interested in. All these changes promise to enable and encourage teachers to identify, adapt and design appropriate pedagogy to nurture creative and critical thinkers in their students.

It is important to note that the adoption of pro-globalisation education strategies through the politics of selling does not mean that the Singapore state has weakened its control due to pressures brought about by globalisation. The Singapore state has remained strong and highly interventionist in its educational reforms. Singapore has continued to be successfully ‘developmentalist’ where the state gains legitimacy through its ability to promote and sustain development. This is achieved through “the combination of steady high rates of economic growth and structural changes in the productive system, both domestically and in relation to the international economy” (Castells 1997, 276; also see Castells 1992; Johnson 1982; White and Wade 1988). Through making tactical changes in its public policies, the Singapore government attempts to anticipate, influence and take advantage of globalisation (Koh 2007; Gopinathan 2007).

Cambodia

In contrast, Cambodia’s educational policy trajectory has shifted from the politics of rebelling to the politics of compelling where it is obligated to accept and implement policy reforms as part of the conditions for foreign aid. The history of Cambodia after the rule of King Sihanouk was marked by coup d'état by General Lon Nol in 1970, the regime of terror under Pol Pot from 1975 to 1979, and the rule under Heng Samrin from 1979 to 1989. The education system was largely left in shambles during the two decades of political instability and economic hardships for the people. After years of civil conflicts and political unrest, the Paris Peace Accords was signed in 1991 which paved the way for free elections organised by the United Nations in 1993. Subsequently millions of dollars from external donor community were poured into Cambodia. Since the 1990s, external donors such as UNICEF and International Red Cross have helped to rebuild 6,000 educational institutions and trained thousands of teachers (Dy and Ninomiya 2003). Between 1993 and 2005, donor agencies have given US$5 billion to Cambodia, including US$504 million pledged in 2005 alone (Mathews 2006). With help of the donor community, the education budget as a part of total government spending in Cambodia increased from between 8.4% and 9.6% during the period 1994-1997 to 12% in 2002 (World Bank 2005). There are

The education system in Cambodia today is based on “an inherited Westernised education system” (Ayres 2000, 460), propagated and planned by Western consultants from international organisations and external donor agencies. The Cambodian government was persuaded by the external donor community to focus on imparting technical, scientific and entrepreneurship skills to the students. The premium placed on capacity building and human resources development reflects the modernisation theory that links a country’s development to economic growth. This theory, advocated by The World Bank for Third-World nation-states such as Cambodia, holds that human resources development, with free trade and minimum state intervention, is the recipe for progress for these countries (Ayres 2000). The priority on developing human capital is evident in the vision of Cambodia’s Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) to “establish and develop human resources of the very highest quality and ethics in order to develop a knowledge-based society within Cambodia” (MoEYS 2005, 1). To achieve this vision, “MoEYS has the mission of leading, managing and developing the Education, Youth and Sport sector in Cambodia in responding to the socio-economic and cultural development needs and the reality of globalisation” (MoEYS 2005, 1).

Within the politics of compelling, Cambodia was constrained to introduce educational policy initiatives in the following three main areas: decentralisation; ICT; and student-centred pedagogy. First, decentralisation reform was launched in Cambodia since 2001 to “enable greater decentralisation of authority and responsibilities to provincial, district, commune and school level—with central Ministry’s role focused on policy and strategy development and sector and programme monitoring” (MoEYS and UNICEF 2005, 14). Several strategies were introduced to delegate authority and responsibilities to provincial, district, commune and school levels. They include providing a clearly defined legislative, regulatory framework to the sector and the subsectors through the adoption of the Education Law; improving governance and regulatory systems by increasing transparency and accountability of resources, including external assistance; and strengthening education system performance monitoring and impact systems (MoEYS and UNICEF 2005). An example of an educational programme to support decentralisation is the ‘Sector-wide approach’ (SWAp) where all significant funding in the sector supports a single sector policy and expenditure programme by adopting common approaches across sector, and progressing towards relying on government procedures to disburse and account for all funds (MoEYS and UNICEF 2005). That this is an example of compelling is seen in the report stating as follows: “Like many other developing countries which now implement SWAp, donors introduced and endorsed the idea of SWAp in Cambodia and convinced the Government to adopt it” (MoEYS and UNICEF 2005, 7).

Secondly, the Cambodian government, with the technical and financial assistance of external donors such as UNESCO, has embarked on equipping the country with ICT. The aim is to “facilitate greater integration of information and communication technology (ICT) to improve the effectiveness of education at all levels and to produce the technologically literate, productive and critically thinking workforce for the country” (MoEYS 2004, 4). MoEYS’ goals for ICT are to increase access to basic education for all using ICT as one of the major tools for learning, teaching, searching and sharing information; improve quality of basic education and promote independent and lifelong learning, especially for post-primary education; supply a workforce with the ICT skills needed for employment and use in a knowledge-based society; and to ensure that Cambodia can compete and cooperate in an increasingly interconnected world (MoEYS
2004). The task to promote ICT to Cambodian schools is daunting as an overwhelming majority of the population has little or no access to the computers or the Internet. 75 per cent of secondary schools in Cambodia have no power supply at all, and very few state schools have computers (MoEYS 2004). Hence the attainment of the goals of ICT is impossible without the immense technical and financial assistance from the external aid organisations. Since 2003, all students in teacher colleges have to attend 2 hours per week in ICT courses (MoEYS 2004). More than 300 teacher trainers had attended training courses in using ICT for administration, teaching and learning in 2004. MoEYS aims to train 5,000 existing teachers and 10,000 new teachers at all levels with ICT training per year from 2006.

Linked to the ICT initiative is the move towards student-centred pedagogy. Besides preparing the students for the digital age, MoEYS also states that the use of ICT aims to help teachers move towards student centred teaching and learning. By offering new teaching materials and new curriculum orientation for teachers, it is hoped that teachers will promote active and independent student learning (MoEYS 2004). Trainee teachers also learn about student-centred pedagogies such as cooperative learning strategies in teacher training colleges. This emphasis on student-centred pedagogy is in alignment with MoEYS’ overarching objective of nurturing students who possess entrepreneurship, high creativity and responsibility to succeed in life (MoEYS 2005).

**Looking Ahead: Towards the Politics of Gelling?**

The preceding points out that while both Singapore and Cambodia began with the politics of telling during the colonial period and the politics of rebelling during the post-colonial period, they parted company in their educational policy trajectories subsequently. Singapore, under a strong interventionist government, was able to autonomously initiate, conceptualise and implement selected educational policies to prepare its citizens for the globalised age. On the other hand, Cambodia, as one of the poorest countries in the world, has to adopt and execute educational policies privileged by the external donor community in exchange for assistance. Despite their different educational policy trajectories, both countries have focused on decentralisation, ICT and student-centred pedagogy, in their agenda to meet the demands of globalisation. Through decentralisation, it is hoped that schools will be entrusted with more responsibilities and freedom to introduce ICT-related and student-centred teaching. But the successful implementation of these reforms is by no means easy. Globalisation has brought with it teaching practices that are foreign to and incompatible with local existing practices. Common to both Singapore and Cambodia is the challenge to shift from a teacher-centred textbook-based approach to a student-centred ICT-based approach in teaching and learning. Commenting on ICT, Deng and Gopinathan (2005) point out that teachers are expected to be role models of learners by being adaptable, innovative, and creative in developing IT-based teaching methods, and to instil in their students independent learning, critical and creative thinking using IT as a cognitive tool.

But such a student-centred pedagogy is alien to many teachers in Singapore and Cambodia as the prevailing pedagogy is teacher-centred and examination oriented with an over-reliance on textbooks. Researchers have pointed out that teachers and students in Singapore tend to prefer directive teaching and rote-learning (e.g., see Moo 1997; Chew, Ng, Lee, and D’Rozario 1997; Cheah 1998; Sripathy 1998; Deng and Gopinathan 1999; Tan 2006). A study on the learning styles of Secondary 4 (16 years old) students in Singapore showed that they prefer traditional ways of teaching where they can observe, listen and reflect (Lim 1995; Lim 1996). Likewise, in Cambodia, it has been noted that “the teaching-learning process is often
based on rote approach with very little opportunities for active learning by children” (MoEYS and UNICEF 2005, 10). Aggravating this is the fact that the content in is too heavy for the Cambodian students to master given the short learning hours in schools. Many Cambodian teachers are also more accustomed to the teacher-centred way of teaching where their main goal is to teach from the textbook and give the students the ‘correct answers’ for them to ace the national examinations.

Given the existing socio-cultural context in Singapore and Cambodia, there is a gap between the teacher-centred transmission and student-centred constructions of knowledge in learning. Noting that young students tend to be more savvy in ICT than older teachers, Cameron (2004, 342), in his research on Asian educational contexts, asserts that the “practical frustrations involved in trying to integrate ICT, and thus new skills and knowledge as well as technological media, into teaching and learning reinforce the potential for embarrassment (and thus ‘loss of face’) in front of students, unless teachers redefine their role and their authority in the learning process in other ways”. The cultural factor inhibiting the shift from teacher-centred textbook-based pedagogy to student-centred ICT-based pedagogy is linked to the Confucian culture prevalent in many Asian countries. In an insightful paper, Ho and Ho (2008) identify three dogmas implicit in Confucian educational philosophy: education is the acquisition of correct knowledge, not the discovery of generation of new knowledge; the written word is superior to oral discourse; and the teacher is the repository of knowledge, to be passed onto his students. The implications of these dogmas explain why the resultant pedagogy is teacher-dominated with a high dependence on the textbook and an expectation for the students to exercise caution in speaking (also see Ho 1994; Ho 1998; Ho, Peng and Chan 2001). The Confucian value of filial piety to one’s elders means that the teacher cuts an authoritative figure as a dispenser of knowledge and a disciplinarian, and children are expected to obey and not question. Ho and Ho (2008) further explain how change, creativity and innovation are hampered by the Confucian principles of cognitive conservatism and authoritarian moralism:

Cognitive conservatism refers to a disposition toward resisting cognitive change and preserving existing knowledge structures; it inhibits creativity. Authoritarian moralism embodies two salient features of Confucian-heritage societies: authoritarianism and pervasiveness in applying moral precepts as the primary standard for judging people. .. Common to calls for educational reform is the stress on promoting creativity dictated by economic imperatives. Demanded in the new knowledge-based economy are not just the acquisition, but the generation and innovative application of knowledge. This makes Asian governments nervous, because it is widely believed that educational systems in Asia suppress, rather than promote, creativity and independence and are hence a weak link in the drive for economic fitness (Ho and Ho 2008, 80).

Although Cambodia is less influenced by Confucianism than Singapore, its educational context is shaped by Buddhism which also emphasises the three dogmas of Confucianism. The teaching and learning environment in Cambodian state schools reflect the Buddhist conceptions of education. Teachers in Cambodia are accorded a high status in society as Buddhist teachers were historically regarded as intellectuals and guru (teachers) in society. Traditionally, Cambodian male children studied in religious schools set up by Buddhist monks in the villages. The acquisition of correct knowledge found in Buddhist sutras, not the discovery of generation of new knowledge, was valued in these religious schools. The children are expected to memorise
Buddhist principles (as well as learning Khmer language, rules of propriety and arithmetic) while the Buddhist monks, as religious leaders, are exalted as the repository of knowledge. Due to the Buddhist influences, schooling in Cambodia today prefer rote-learning and reliance on the textbook to acquire correct knowledge, and de-emphasise the generation of new knowledge and oral discourse. Writers have averred that the Buddhist philosophy has unwittingly led to an emphasis on conformity and passivity at the expense of individual thinking (Morris 2000; Pellini 2005). Overall, an individualistic, independent conception of the person is emphasised in the Western culture while Asian culture tends to value social harmony and collectivism (Gopinathan 2006; Tan 2008b).

How then can Asian countries such as Singapore and Cambodia equip their citizens with the ability to think critically and creatively, learn independently and create new knowledge – skills urgently needed in a globalised world – through a student-centred ICT-based learning environment? There is a need for Singapore and Cambodia to remove what Cameron (2004, 343) describes as the “discrepancy between the top-down impositions of theory, policy and rhetoric, on the one hand, and the bottom-up imperatives of learning practice and knowledge application within local contexts of performance”. This does not mean an effort to jettison the teacher-centred textbook-based approach and embrace unreservedly the student-centred ICT-based emphasis in both countries. To do so is to disregard entrenched and powerful contextual factors that may vitiate the effective implementation of pro-globalisation education policies.

What is recommended, rather, is for Singapore and Cambodia to move to the politics of gelling in their educational policy trajectories. As mentioned, this stage refers to the combination of foreign and indigenous sources of knowledge and involves various interest groups such as the government, industry and educational institutions setting new agendas for education. This creation and sustenance of a new indigenised form of knowledge serves to situate and appreciate education policies that promote ICT and student-centred pedagogy within local socio-cultural realities. Currently what Singaporean and Cambodian teachers and students lack is not additional new knowledge, skills, programmes and models transported from the Western countries. Instead, what they lack is the space to develop an educational paradigm that is more culturally scripted and authentic. To achieve this, various interest groups in society such as the government, educational institutions, teachers, parents and other educational stakeholders could work together to propose new sources of knowledge and educational policies that gell the global and local. Indigenous knowledge should include not just traditional knowledge but ways in which non-indigenous knowledge has been adapted and domesticated to serve national purposes (Gopinathan 2006, also see Semali 2002; Canagarajah 2002). The gelling process is complex, fluid and continuous, involving the various parties understanding and critiquing global and local knowledge.

The politics of gelling means the interest groups need to decide on how teachers can transit from being repositories of knowledge to being co-creators of knowledge and facilitators of learning without jeopardising the high status they enjoy as teachers in society. For student-centred programmes which aim to promote critical and creative thinking in students, gelling involves encouraging students to speak up and even challenge authority without being perceived as disrespectful. To do so, researchers could explore Asian traditions and philosophies that provide an alternative account of teaching and learning to the dominant Confucian ideology. For example, McEwan, Yang and Xu (2008) aver that an ancient Confucian text, Xue Ji, debunks the view that Asian educational ideas and practices are authoritarian, value obedience to authority over individual inquiry, memorisation over comprehension, and uniformity over diversity.
In terms of pedagogies, teachers could adopt pedagogies that are compatible with the Asian emphasis on social harmony and ‘giving face’. For example, the Community of Inquiry approach, through its ethics of care, encourages students to think critically in a caring manner as members of the community. Further gelling could be achieved when the various interest groups play an active role in reflecting, discussing, formulating and implementing foreign and indigenous educational ideas and practices. In the case of Cambodia, Tan (2008a) points out the disparity between the traditional view of education in Cambodia and the contemporary view of education advocated by external donor community. Gelling means that the external aid organisations need to work not only with the government but also the local community and religious institutions.

Conclusion
This paper explored the educational policy trajectories of Singapore and Cambodia in an era of globalisation. It draws upon Johnson (2006)’s five metaphors to describe the historical and political forces that are relevant to the educational policy trajectories of Singapore and Cambodia: telling, rebelling, compelling, selling, and gelling. The paper argued that both Singapore and Cambodia underwent the politics of telling and rebelling during the colonial period. But while Cambodia proceeded to the politics of compelling, Singapore was able to move on to the politics of selling. Cambodia’s educational policy trajectory is characterised by the politics of compelling as the country is obligated to accept and implement policy reforms as part of the conditions for foreign aid. In contrast, Singapore’s situation is more akin to the politics of selling as it is controlled by a strong state that is keen to adapt pro-globalisation educational policies but at its own terms.

The paper pointed out the common challenge for Singapore and Cambodia to shift from a traditional teacher-centred textbook-based approach to student-centred ICT-based approach in a globalised world. The last section of this paper recommended that this challenge can be overcome if Singapore and Cambodia move to the politics of gelling in their educational policy trajectories where a new agenda for education combining foreign and indigenous sources of knowledge involving various interest groups can be set. Given that educational policies are subject to a multitude of powerful and often conflicting forces from within and without, it will be interesting to see how the educational policy trajectories of Singapore and Cambodia continue to evolve and take shape in an era of globalisation.

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