
Title	A critical reflection of teacher professionalism in Cambodia
Author(s)	Charlene Tan and Pak Tee Ng
Source	<i>Asian Education and Development Studies</i> , 1(2), 124–138. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/20463161211240106
Published by	Emerald Group Publishing Limited

This is the author's version (post-print) of a work that was accepted for publication in the following source:

Tan, C., & Ng, P. T. (2012). A critical reflection of teacher professionalism in Cambodia. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, 1(2), 124–138.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/20463161211240106>

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/20463161211240106>

Tan, C. & Ng, P.T. (2012). A critical reflection of teacher professionalism in Cambodia. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, 1(2), 124-138.

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A Critical Reflection of Teacher Professionalism in Cambodia

Charlene Tan & Pak Tee Ng

Abstract

This paper examines the development of teacher professionalism in Cambodia. Using Hargreaves (2000)'s four ages of teacher professionalism and professional learning to frame the discussion, this paper argues that the Cambodian government aims to develop the teachers to become autonomous professionals in terms of curriculum and pedagogical improvements. However the reality is that the Cambodian teachers manifest characteristics of both the pre-professionals and autonomous professionals. This paper also examines the issues and challenges faced in the development of teacher professionalism, which are entwined in the complexities of educational reform, societal and economic development. By identifying some structural, economic and socio-cultural challenges faced by Cambodian teachers, this paper suggests that Cambodian teachers need greater teacher collaboration within a culture of trust and accountability to become collegial professionals. The Cambodian case study also illustrates the potential of comparative and international research on teacher professionalism between Anglophonic and non-Anglophonic cultures.

Keywords

Cambodia; teacher professionalism, pre-professionals; autonomous professionals; collegial professionals; policy; rhetoric; reality

Introduction

Despite a growing body of literature on the education system and policies in Cambodia, there has been little research on *teacher professionalism* in Cambodia. A review of government documents and international reports shows that the priority for teacher education and professional development is primarily structural, academic and technical in nature, such as strengthening teacher supply and demand, training more teachers for flexible staff deployment, and reforming the current teacher-training college programmes (e.g., see MoEYS, 2001, 2004a, b, c, 2005a, b; UNESCO, 2008, 2010). While these measures are necessary and welcome, it is equally important to clarify the concept of teacher professionalism in Cambodia. Such a study will fill the gap in the current scholarship on teacher professionalism in Cambodia, and inform educators and policymakers in their planning and implementation of appropriate education policy initiatives and programmes.

Using Hargreaves (2000)'s concept of teacher professionalism to frame the discussion, this paper examines the issue of teacher professionalism in Cambodia. The research data is drawn primarily from literature review and document analysis, and supplemented by one of the author's interactions with Cambodian teachers, school principals and teacher trainers arising from her role as a visiting lecturer at a Cambodian university from 2004 to 2010. The paper begins by discussing the theoretical framework based on Hargreaves' four ages of teacher professionalism and professional learning. The next section introduces Cambodia and its education system, followed by a discussion of the state agenda for teacher education and the reality of teacher professionalism in the country. The last

section discusses the issues, challenges and prospects in developing teacher professionalism in Cambodia.

Hargreaves' Four Ages of Teacher Professionalism and Professional Learning

Professionalism refers to improving the quality and standards of teacher practice, while professionalisation refers to improving the status and standing of teachers (Hargreaves, 2000). According to Hargreaves (2000), there are the four ages of teachers' professionalism and professional learning: the pre-professional age, the age of the autonomous professional, the age of the collegial professional, and the age of post-professional or postmodern (all the information on the four ages of teacher professionalism in this section is taken from Hargreaves, 2000 unless otherwise stated).

Pre-professional age refers to the period where teaching is technically simple where one learns to be a teacher through practical apprenticeship and improves through individual trial-and-error. Teachers in the pre-professional age are confined to 'restricted professionalism' (Hoyle, 1975) or 'bounded professional' (Nias, 1989) where teaching is intuitive, classroom-focused, and experience- rather than theory-based. Order and control in the classroom are of utmost importance to the teacher whose teaching tends to be content- and teacher-dominated. These teachers also tend to see themselves as 'infallible experts'. According to Elliot (1991), such a teacher engages in one-way communication where the teacher tells and prescribes while the student listens and obeys. Perceiving oneself as possessing superior knowledge and wisdom, such a teacher "applies specialist knowledge intuitively rather than reflectively on the basis of the commonsense wisdom enshrined in the occupational culture" (Elliot, 1991, p. 312). There are also little interaction and limited feedback on teaching among the teachers who have received little training or ongoing professional learning.

The next age is that of the autonomous professional where the status of teachers is higher compared with that in the pre-professional age. Characterised by curriculum and pedagogical innovations, it is a period where teachers are given the occupational security and dignity, material reward, trust and professional discretion. However, teacher autonomy has unwittingly led to limited success in the implementation of educational innovations as not all teachers are able or willing to adopt these changes in practice. Teachers who attend professional development courses find it difficult to integrate what they had learned into their practice due largely to a lack of structural support in schools. This age is also marked by teacher individualism where teachers are separated from their colleagues and instruct their classes in isolation. Hargreaves notes that when teachers do interact, "this tended to be around materials, discipline, and individual student problems rather than about curriculum goals, teaching behaviour, or classroom learning" (p. 160, also see Lortie, 1975; Little, 1990). Teacher professionalism in this age is still restricted (Hoyle, 1975) as the autonomy is confined to classroom concerns with limited accountability to students and other stakeholders.

The next age is the age of the collegial professional where the increased complexities of schooling challenge the sustainability of individual teacher autonomy. Cultures of teacher collaboration exist for widespread improvements and successful implementation in teaching and learning. Teacher collaboration goes beyond talk and is evident in practice within professional learning communities. Teachers in this age are able to collaborate in order to "develop common purpose, to cope with uncertainty and complexity, to respond effectively to rapid change and reform, to create a climate which values risk-taking and continuous improvement, to develop stronger senses of teacher efficacy, and to create ongoing professional learning cultures for teachers" (Hargreaves, pp. 165-166). There is a shift from

teachers as ‘infallible experts’ to ‘reflective practitioners’ who work with others in identifying, clarifying and resolving their problems (Elliot, 1991). Emphasising the importance of a holistic understanding of situation as the basis for professional practice, they practise self-reflection as a means of overcoming stereotypical judgements and responses (Elliot, 1991). These teachers are ‘extended professional teachers’ who engage in research, link theory to practice, and partner with educational stakeholders beyond their own classrooms. Teacher collegiality, while apparent, is authentic and well-supported, and not contrived and imposed.

The fourth and final age is the age of post-professional or postmodern professional. Hargreaves notes that postmodern developments in economics and communications have led to the marketisation of education. This threatens to de-professionalise teachers who work under a centralised curricula and testing regime that restrict teacher autonomy and subject them to performance management targets, standards, monitoring and accountability. What teachers need to do is to defend themselves against these powerful forces of de-professionalisation through measures such as struggling for substantial and competitive salaries for all teachers. He adds that they should also extend and enrich the idea and practice of collegial professionalism in ways which will genuinely improve the quality of teaching, such as ensuring that their collaborative efforts work towards improving teaching, learning and caring in school.

Hargreaves clarifies that the four ages represent a contingent history of the four broad phases of the changing nature of teacher professionalism across Anglophone cultures. The ages are neither universal across all Anglophone and non-Anglophone cultures, nor are they discrete and necessary stages that all other cultures must follow in the same order. Given the Anglophonic source and association of the four ages of teacher professionalism and professional learning, it will be interesting to see how far these phases are relevant to non-Anglophone cultures such as that of Cambodia.

Introduction to Cambodia

Cambodia is a country with about 13 million citizens with a long history that began in the second century (for a detailed discussion of the history of Cambodia, see Sodhy, 2004; Fergusson and Le Masson, 1997; Duggan, 1996). Cambodia today still suffers from the effects of the Khmer Rouge rule from 1975 to 1979 where at least 1.7 million people out of about seven million died, and between 75% and 80% of Cambodia’s teachers and higher education students fled or died (Duggan, 1994, cited in Fergusson and LeMasson, 1997). In the early 1980s, Cambodia was left with few surviving teachers, many unqualified teachers and no quality teacher training programme (UNICEF, 1989). Since the 1990s, teacher training and in particular in-service training has been a priority for the Cambodian government and external donor agencies (Duggan, 1996). The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) in Cambodia introduced measures to upgrade pre-service teacher (PRESET) and in-service teacher (INSET) training programmes.

Currently there are about 80,000 teaching staff teaching in a total of 9,431 schools (primary, lower and upper secondary schools); about 3,000 are pre-school teachers, 47,000 are primary school teachers, 23,000 are lower-secondary school teachers, and 6,800 are upper-secondary school teachers (UNESCO, 2010). However, there is still a shortage of teachers in Cambodia at all levels: about 5000 new teachers are needed every year (UNESCO, 2010). In addition, a majority of teachers remain unqualified: only 32% of primary school teachers fulfil the state requirements of 12 years of education plus two years of teacher training diploma in 2004 (MOEYS & UNICEF, 2005). In 2004-2005, only 36% of teachers have at least lower secondary diplomas, an increase from 26% in the 2000-01 school year, but still below the Education Strategic Plan’s target of 51% (MoEYS, 2005a). The

problem is particularly acute in the remote and rural areas: about 34.5% of teachers in remote areas, and 6.4% in rural areas have not studied beyond the primary level (UNESCO, 2010).

The State Agenda for Teacher Professionalism: Towards the Age of Autonomous Professionals

Based on Hargreaves's four ages of teacher professionalism and professional learning, it appears that the Cambodian government aims to shift teacher professionalism in Cambodia from *the age of the pre-professional* to *the age of the autonomous professional* in terms of curriculum and pedagogical improvements.

The Cambodian government has announced an array of policies and initiatives to achieve its professed goal of making the Cambodian teachers less pre-professional and becoming autonomous professionals. Aware of the historical problems of a large pool of unqualified, poorly trained and ill-prepared teachers in Cambodia, MoEYS has announced its resolve to introduce structural, academic and technical changes to teacher education and professional development. Key strategies include strengthening teacher supply and demand, training more teachers for flexible staff deployment, and reforming the current teacher-training college programmes. Professional teacher development – a distinguishing feature of the autonomous professionals – is planned for both pre-service and in-service training. MoEYS aims to improve pre-service teacher (PRESET) training programmes through teacher training curriculum reform and development (MoEYS, 2004b). Specifically, pre-service teachers will learn multi-subject teaching, multi-grade teaching, ethnic minority teaching, and teaching of HIV/AIDS life skills. The agenda for in-service training includes educational innovative pilot programmes that promote critical and creative thinking, improved psychosocial learning environments and parental engagement. Current teachers will also receive new curriculum orientation to enhance student learning through new teaching materials (MoEYS, 2004c, 2005b).

MoEYS has also announced its plan to increase teacher remuneration – a key factor to enhance the material rewards and occupational security of the teachers. A related strategy to increase the teachers' competency and social status is to help them to be digitally connected through the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Cambodian schools. MoEYS intends to train 5,000 existing teachers and 10,000 new teachers at all levels with ICT training per year from 2006 (MoEYS, 2004a). It also plans to recruit 5,000 new trainees at teacher-training colleges per year and upgrade primary school teachers to become lower secondary (MoEYS, 2005b). Other plans to support the teachers to become autonomous professionals are quality oriented priority programmes in instructional materials, teacher development and service efficiency. To ensure minimum standards of student achievement, MoEYS aims to implement standard testing and disseminate the results for grades 3, 6 and 9 nation-wide (MoEYS, 2005a). It is hoped that this will be achieved with the introduction of a nation-wide staff performance appraisal system and regulation of minimum standards of performance and workloads (MoEYS, 2005a, b).

The Reality of Teacher Professionalism in Cambodia

Despite the official agenda to nurture teachers as autonomous professionals in curriculum and pedagogical improvements, the reality of teacher professionalism in Cambodia is a hybrid of *the age of the pre-professional* and *the age of the autonomous professional*. On the one hand, Cambodia has progressed in some ways from the age of pre-professional age where the teacher learned from practical apprenticeship and teaching through trial-and-error and received no formal training. Compared to the status of teachers a few decades ago,

Cambodian teachers today are better qualified and trained, having learnt about new knowledge, theories and skills. That some form of structured teacher education and professional learning exists in Cambodia is attested to in the existence of teacher training colleges and graduates from these institutions.

Currently, the National Institute for Education (NIE) trains more than 500 upper secondary school teachers annually; there are also six Regional Teacher Training Colleges (RTTC) to train about 1,450 lower secondary school teachers, 18 Provincial Teacher Training Centres (PTTC) to train about 2,200 primary school teachers, and 15 resource centres in provinces where PTTC's and RTTC's do not exist (UNESCO, 2010). In terms of teacher education, all students in teacher colleges attend 2 hours per week in ICT courses since 2003 (MoEYS, 2004a). More than 300 teacher trainers have attended training courses in using ICT for administration, teaching and learning in 2004. School teachers have also attended workshops on content upgrading and orientation programmes for the new textbooks and curriculum (MoEYS, 2001; SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2003). The public expenditure on education as a percentage of the national budget has also risen from 13.9% in 2000 to 19.2% in 2007 (UNESCO, 2008). Due to the low academic qualifications of trainee teachers, more time in teacher training is devoted to academic upgrading and less on teaching methodology and in-school teaching practices (UNESCO, 2010). However, the less desirable characteristics of the autonomous professionals - contrary to the state agenda - are also detectable in Cambodia. This can be seen in three ways.

Lack of Structural Support

First, while educational innovations have been provided for the teachers through pre-service and in-service education, these innovations are often not implemented in the classroom due to a lack of structural support in schools. This is primarily due to contextual constraints faced by the teachers when they return to their schools, such as large class sizes, limited infrastructure, resources and lack of support from school leaders and colleagues (Tan, 2008). Many teachers also face contextual challenges such as “the lack of teaching-learning materials, the absence of teacher support, the large class size, and the double-shift classes, leaving very little time for co-curricular activities”, all of which contribute to “low learning achievement of the children” (SEAMEO INNOTECH, 2003). The pre-service training has also been found to have limited relevance to classroom practice, aggravated by teacher trainers who are inadequately prepared (Duthilleul, 2004, cited in World Bank, 2005). The in-service teacher training efforts are also concentrated at the primary level and lack structure and planning (World Bank, 2005).

Limited Interaction and Feedback among Teachers

Secondly, there is still little interaction and feedback on teaching among the teachers, which is another hallmark of autonomous professionals. There are few incentives and little motivation for Cambodian teachers to collaborate with other teachers to improve teaching and learning. Most teachers are separated from their colleagues and instruct their classes in isolation. This does not mean that the Cambodian teachers do not work together at all. Many Cambodian teachers are expected to work with other teachers mainly on official school matters such as planning activities such as Sports Day and disciplining the students. In many schools, formal time to foster teacher collaboration includes monthly staff meetings where the teachers would gather to discuss school issues and student matters. There are also monthly meetings planned by the school to discuss teaching methods. Lasting about one hour per subject, the meeting consists of an experienced classroom teacher (known as ‘Technique

Teacher’) demonstrating teaching a lesson while other teachers observe, take notes and discuss after the lesson.

However, the monthly meetings as well as the agendas in the public schools are usually imposed on the teachers by the senior management rather than initiated by the teachers themselves. Although teachers are encouraged to participate during the meetings, most of the interaction among the teachers is based on the practical necessity to carry out official duties and manage the behaviour of the students. Consequently, these meetings do not directly contribute towards the creation of a community of reflective learners and collaborators. Apart from formalised, compulsory and structured programmes for teacher cooperation, there is no prevalent practice of teacher collaboration among themselves. Most teachers do not take the initiative to collaborate by discussing, planning or observing each other’s lessons, nor do they share ideas with and receive feedback from other teachers on curriculum and pedagogy. In other words, teacher collegiality is contrived rather than authentic and well-supported.

Teacher Individualism

Thirdly, the lack of teacher collaboration further points to the phenomenon of teacher individualism – another feature of the autonomous professionals. Teacher autonomy is confined to individual subject expertise and classroom concerns, with a strong emphasis on maintaining order and control in the classroom. Concomitantly, the teachers’ accountability to students and other stakeholders is limited. The accent on individualism among Cambodian teachers is not surprising. The Cambodian culture has been described as individualistic rather than collectivist due to the Buddhist idea of individual responsibility for sin and salvation (Morris, 2000; Tan, 2007, 2008). The Buddhist doctrine of relative merit encourages many Buddhists in Cambodia to passively accept the good and bad in this world as the consequence of one’s deeds in his or her past life, and to accumulate more merit to enjoy happiness in the next life.

An individualistic worldview may have contributed towards the Cambodian teachers preferring to view themselves as solitary classroom leaders who are in control of their classroom affairs, with the authority and autonomy to choose the content and teaching methods. Teacher leadership often does not extend to planning and actualising innovative school programmes such as school-based teacher training programmes or mentoring new teachers. The limited teacher collaboration is aggravated by the phenomenon of ‘Balkanisation’ in the school setting where teachers are segregated due to different subjects, levels, and years of experience.

On the other hand, key characteristics of the pre-professionals are also discernible among the Cambodian teachers. The dominant form of teaching is still content- and teacher-dominated due to the teachers’ overriding concern for discipline and order in the classroom, and their confidence in the tried-and-tested teacher-centred teaching. It was reported that “the teaching-learning process is often based on rote approach with very little opportunities for active learning by children” (MoEYS and UNICEF, 2005, p. 10).

Another indication of many Cambodian teachers remaining as pre-professionals rather than progressing to autonomous professionals is their perennial low socio-economic and professional status. Despite official rhetoric, the teachers still receive low pay, poor working conditions, few opportunities for scholarships, limited career path and promotion prospects, and low public recognition. The official teacher’s salary is barely enough to support even the teacher himself or herself, and is definitely not enough for a teacher in Cambodia to support even one additional person. The low pay of teachers has driven many of them to openly charge money for supplementary tutoring and other contributions. Students who cannot

afford or refuse to pay their teachers risk failing their exams, repeating the grade or dropping out of school. The collection of such fees by the teachers has adversely affected the relationship between the teacher and the local community (MoEYS and UNICEF, 2005). The low pay of the teachers contributes to poor teaching quality, which in turn leads to poor learning achievement of children. Although the collection of fees and contributions is officially banned by the ministry, many teachers are still practising it, using the school premises for their tutoring with the acquiescence of the school leaders.

Issues and Challenges of Teacher Professionalism in Cambodia

The development of teacher professionalism is not an isolated issue, divorced from the complexities of the educational system and indeed the society and its economy. Indeed, it is probably more accurate to say that the stage of development of teacher professionalism in a country is reflection of the wider and multi-faceted context of education reform and economic progress. Cambodia is a country that is in a fluid state of development after a long and bloody war. Therefore, the issues and challenges to developing teacher professionalism are complex and multi-dimensional.

Revamp the Teaching System

Firstly, the issue of teacher professionalism is inter-twinned with education reform in the country. There is often a gap between policy rhetoric and actual ground reality in education reform (Ng, 2008a). This is even more so in a war-torn developing country. When the government has indicated its commitment to revamping the education system, and in particular the service condition of the teachers, what the teachers experience on the ground is something rather different. The state has a critical role in developing the education system (Fagerlind and Saha, 1989), to support the plan for national development (Thomas, 1992). If teachers have to resort to tutoring students privately as a means of augmenting their income for survival, this is an example of a declining role of the state in ensuring quality education (Thomas, 1990). On one hand, the government ‘promises’ improvement in the service conditions, but on the other hand, the realities do not match up. Therefore, the government must put its money where its heart is. Hygiene factors need to be addressed adequately before motivators can begin its work (Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman, 1959).

Therefore, at the fundamental level, there is an urgency to revamp the teaching system through comprehensive strategies linked to broader civil service reform constraints (Tan, 2007). These reforms should involve “a deeper teacher remuneration overhaul inclusive of teaching service conditions, minimum standards, and performance-based incentives within a sustainable budget framework” (World Bank, 2005, p. 7). Specifically, the government needs to go beyond expressing its state agenda to effectively increase the teacher remuneration to at least the minimum wage needed for a Cambodian teacher to support his or her family. A study on quality improvement interventions in Cambodia shows that money invested in teacher development has the highest payoff in terms of student retention, promotion, and student learning (Marshall, 2004, cited in World Bank, 2005). The government should also ensure greater transparency, integrity and recognition based on merit for the teachers.

These changes are of course not easy; they need to be accompanied by a major change of mindset from the key stakeholders of education to create and sustain a conducive socio-economic culture for the teacher professionalism. In this regard, the Cambodian government can refer to Kemmerer’s choice model (Kemmerer, 1990) for teacher incentives as a framework to analyse the needs of the teaching profession. This model assumes that teacher

performance directly affects student learning, and that teacher performance can be enhanced by incentives, which include salary, bonuses, benefits and working conditions such as good environment, instructional support, supervision, teacher training and career opportunities (Kemmerer, 1990).

Meeting the Teachers' Needs

Secondly, there is an issue of how the teachers relate with the authorities. Central government can plan for education reform but it is the teachers who implement change. Teaching is “an emotional practice” because emotions “are at the heart of teaching” (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 835). Therefore, the government has to engage the hearts of the teachers. The question is whether the government has buy-in from the teacher profession. Jersild (1955) argues that emotions such as anxiety, fear, loneliness, helplessness, meaninglessness and hostility in relation to understanding the self are prevalent in teachers' lives in schools and classrooms and must, therefore, be addressed as part of teachers' professional education. This is certainly so in the case of Cambodian teachers.

If the basic needs are not satisfied, it is hard for the teachers to buy into a reform agenda by the government. According to Korthagen (1993), beliefs about teaching and learning which have accumulated over years of school and life experiences, are highly resistant to change. This is even more so for the teachers in Cambodia, through years of war and poverty. Richardson (1996, p. 105) contends that “if knowledge and beliefs affect teachers' decisions and actions, their interactions with students, and their satisfaction with their profession, then beliefs should be a focus for instruction and a target for change during teacher education”. Therefore, the Cambodia government should look into providing more than merely structural change. More must be done by the government to meet the basic needs of the teachers in terms of providing material incentives and encouraging greater teacher autonomy and participation in the school policy making and implementation. In addition, there is a need for the government to be aware of the teachers' emotions, address their grievances and work with them to raise the teacher professionalism.

Education policy formulation and implementation is a complex and contested process (Ball, 1990, 1994a; Karlsson et al., 2001). Implementation is affected by the dynamical interaction between the central government and other system levels, where different values and survival issues take central stage (Ng, 2008a). Therefore, educational initiatives are subject to a process of mutual adaptation (Berman and McLaughlin, 1978), or even mutation to suit ground condition (Ng, 2008a). In fact, there could be resistance to and subversion of these policies at target schools and institutions, a phenomenon known as counter-policy (Hall and Wallace, 1993; Wallace, 1998; Ng, 2008a). In Cambodia, this is a pertinent issue. Poor conditions in schools, teacher shortage, poor parental support, low wages, all add to the harsh realities on the ground. Government policy and school realities can be two different things, each of which is not an intentional subversion of the other, merely a survival tactic.

Therefore, there is a challenge of getting the teachers to believe in and actively support the education reforms. Even so, education reforms in Cambodia shows that there is some resolve in making education more effective and appropriate to its economic development, something more concrete that the teachers could see. Education reform is crucial to support a revitalisation plan for its floundering economy. The World Bank has been involved in education quality improvement projects in Cambodia (World Bank, 2005). In particular, the Cambodia Education Sector Support Project (ongoing) assists the Cambodian government in implementing its Education Strategic Sector Plan (ESSP) goals of expanding access to educational services by expanding educational facilities in poor and under-served areas, delivering scholarship programs to poor children, providing training and

capacity building at local levels to improve education services and addressing specific implementation issues around the ESSP. Some are sceptical of such schemes (e.g. Toye, 1987; [Ilon, 1997](#)), but it still represents a hope of moving forward.

Investment in Teacher Education

Thirdly, the Cambodian government needs to invest more in teacher education. Darling-Hammond (2000, p. 167) contends that “reviews of research over the past 30 years have concluded that even with the shortcomings of current teacher education and licensing, fully prepared and certified teachers are generally better rated and more successful with students than teachers without this preparation”. Of course, teacher education does not need to be conducted in the traditional teacher training manner. The Cambodian government, with the cultural understanding and support of external aid agencies, could foster teacher collaboration through ways such as reflective practice and action research. Cambodian teachers could draw examples from countries that have implemented collaborative reflective practice such as Singapore, England and Wales, the United States and Norway (e.g. Elliot, 1991; [Zeichner and Liston, 1996](#); [Valli, 1997](#); [McLaughlin, 1999](#); [Ottesen, 2007](#), [Ng and Tan, 2009](#)). As reflective practitioners and action researchers, teachers are respected as professionals who play active roles in formulating the purposes, ends and means of their work ([Zeichner, 1993](#)). The expertise of teachers should reside in their ability to collaboratively and continuously question and interrogate the terms and conditions that govern their own transactions with students (Elliot, 2002).

However, new theories and practices such as constructivism, reflective practice and action research should not be imposed on the teachers in Cambodia without considering the local context, constraints and needs. This is because what works in one context will not necessarily work in another context. After all, the concerns and challenges of teachers in developing and rural countries such as Cambodia are vastly different from those in developed and urban countries such as the United States and the European countries. Therefore an indigenised teacher education curriculum should be developed in Cambodia where knowledge is more culturally scripted and authentic. Indigenous knowledge includes not just traditional knowledge but ways in which non-indigenous knowledge has been adapted and domesticated to serve national purposes ([Gopinathan, 2006](#)). This involves a complex and continuous process of understanding and critiquing knowledge which is regarded as fluid and relational ([Gopinathan, 2006](#), also see [Semali, 2002](#); [Canagarajah, 2002](#)). So, on a more positive note, although education policy is often subject to adaptation at the ground level, this gap is not necessarily ‘evil’ ([Ng, 2008a](#)). It allows teachers to find something that really works for them in their context for the time being. According to [Ng \(2008a, p. 600\)](#), “Rhetoric usually speaks of ideals through malleable and nebulous language. It can signal various desiderata or directions but may not rigidly determine which concrete actions to be embedded within. So, even when implementation reality may not correspond closely to policy rhetoric, it is possible that the adaptation of the policy allows for a better fit with the local context while allowing the policy rhetoric to retain its evocative values for an ideal state of affairs”.

For example, given the cultural emphasis on individualism in Cambodia, teachers in Cambodia can be assured that teacher collaboration, where they are expected to freely share their expertise and ideas, will not undermine their autonomy, authority and personal interests. Teacher collaboration should not come in the form of top-down mandates. It should instead complement teacher autonomy through informal and spontaneous interactions. Schools can set aside time for informal professional planning, reflection and sharing, and provide incentives for the formation of communities of researchers. Of course, the key question here

is the quality of school leadership and how that helps in teacher professionalism. To allow a higher level of professionalism to be exercised, a system requires good leaders at the helm of schools, leaders who are forward-looking and innovative and who really wants change instead of wanting inertia (Ng, 2008b). At this moment, the same challenge that plagues Cambodia regarding the quality of teachers applies equally at the school leadership level.

Build a Culture of Trust and Accountability

Fourthly, it is a challenge to encourage teachers in Cambodia to work together to develop common goals and deal with uncertainties and new challenges in a globalised and complex world, rather than working alone or cooperating through contrived means. Hargreaves (2000) cautions that the limited feedback on performance and support from colleagues may lead to a lack of confidence and certainty about effectiveness, impaired improvement as a teacher, limited senses of efficacy and of self-belief in the power to change children's lives and futures, and the tendency to focus on short term improvement in one's own classroom rather than on more fundamental forms of long-term or school-wide change (also see Rizvi and Elliot, 2005).

What is recommended is a climate which "values risk-taking and continuous improvement, to develop stronger senses of teacher efficacy, and to create ongoing professional learning cultures for teachers" should be created and sustained (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 166). This means that it is imperative to nurture a culture of trust and accountability in Cambodia. According to Codd (2005), 'high trust accountability' is underpinned by internal motivations such as commitment, loyalty and sense of duty:

It involves accountability to client beneficiaries and professional peers and is achieved, not by performance assessment or external audits, but by procedures which enable teachers to communicate their values, interpretations and judgements to others, making public the reasons and evidence which provide the grounds for holding them. Where others perceive or interpret things differently, there is a mutual search for common ground; a rational attempt to resolve the differences through discussion that is carried out in an impartial and as open a manner as can be achieved (p. 203).

One way to establish a culture of collaboration so as to change the teachers' and school leaders' mindset is to introduce Professional Learning Community (PLC) to the school. Hord (1997) defines a PLC is one

in which the teachers in a school and its administrators continuously seek and share learning, and act on their learning. The goal of their actions is to enhance their effectiveness as professionals for the students' benefit; thus, this arrangement may also be termed communities of continuous inquiry and improvement. The notion, therefore, draws attention to the potential for a range of people, based inside and outside a school, to mutually enhance each other's and pupils' learning as well as school development (p. 1, as cited in Hairon, 2011, p. 152).

According to Hairon (2011), a PLC may consist of several Professional Learning Teams (PLTs), with each PLT comprising school leaders and teachers belonging to the same grade level or the same teaching subject. The function of the PLC is to focus on '3 Big Ideas' or aims, and '4 Critical Questions' so as to positively impact on classroom teaching, school learning culture, and student outcomes. The '3 Big Ideas' are enabling students learning; building a culture of collaboration; and focusing on student outcomes. The '4 Critical

Questions' are: What is it we expect students to learn? How will we know when they have learned? How will we respond when they don't learn? How will we respond when they already know it? To ensure a cyclical process of continuous improvement, PLC may include the following, depending on the local conditions: the use of data to identify student needs; study and analysis of teachers' own and peer research; engagement in rigorous reflection; use of research and professional wisdom to make good choices; collaborative experiment with new teaching practices; monitoring and assessment of implementation; and communication of information to other stakeholders (Hairon, 2011). The PLC provides a common platform for school leaders and teachers to collaborate in a non top-down manner through informal professional planning, reflection and sharing. The issues discussed in the PLC should go beyond subject knowledge to include larger concerns such as the teachers' professional competence via leadership, organisational and teacher culture. These concerns are useful for understanding why collaboration is not fully accepted and recognised amongst teachers in Cambodia.

Conclusion

The case of Cambodia illustrates the challenges and prospects of teacher professionalism in other developing countries. For example, the problems in Cambodia such as a shortage of teachers, inadequate training and incentives for teachers, and low teacher morale are also evident in Brazil, Vietnam, and India and Kenya (Glewwe and Kremer, 2005). There is therefore a need to go beyond structural, academic and technical improvements in teacher education and professional developments in Cambodia as well as other developing countries. This paper has argued that teachers will see greater congruence between theory and practice when they become collegial professionals. As indigenised reflective practitioners and action researchers, they will be able to collaboratively identify and solve their problems through researching and applying innovative and effective theories and ideas, and partnering with educational stakeholders in their communities.

Our reflections on and application of Hargreaves' four broad historical phases to Cambodia suggests that such a framework is helpful for researchers and educators to explore the trajectories, transitions and prospects of teacher professionalism in a country. However, it should be pointed out that there is a limit to our applicability of Hargreaves' framework, which is located in Anglophonic contexts, to third-world Asian countries such as Cambodia. Only the first three ages are relevant to Cambodia as the last stage of post-professional or postmodern is more likely to be experienced by countries with advanced developments in economics and communications coupled with the marketisation of education. Besides providing the framework to guide us in interpreting the changing nature of teachers' professionalism and professional learning in Cambodia, Hargreaves' four ages serve to highlight the gap between the official discourse and the teachers' perspectives, and the disjunction between policy rhetoric and policy implementation. The reflections on the Cambodian experience point to the potential of comparative research on teacher professionalism between Anglophonic and non-Anglophonic cultures. Such international and cross-cultural studies will, to quote Hargreaves (2000), "contribute a collage of opportunities with which other cultures engage" (p. 152).

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