

# **“Let Me Tell You about Your Lesson”: Reflection in Feedback Following Classroom Observations in Cambodia**

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## ***Abstract***

*Observations are an accepted part of teachers' lives, serving both administrative and professional development purposes. From an administrative perspective, observations serve the purpose of evaluating teachers with a view to quality control. For professional development, observations provide opportunities for reflective enquiry into the teaching and learning process. However, in private schools with limited oversight or links to current academic practice, the actual implementation and utilization of observations and feedback are self-determined and therefore worthy of investigation. This study aimed to find out how private schools in Cambodia utilize observation and subsequent feedback, and specifically the purpose ascribed to them by both the school administration and the teachers. Forty English language teachers in Cambodia were surveyed for their experience of, and response to, classroom observations. Further, academic managers at two schools were interviewed about their goals for classroom observations. Findings indicate that both teachers and school managers approach observations as primarily evaluative. Further, the goal of reflection as an outcome in feedback was rejected by managers and ignored by teachers. Possible reasons for the failure of reflection in feedback are proposed.*

***Keywords:*** *teacher supervision, lesson observation, reflection on teaching*

## **1. Introduction**

Observations of lessons have become an accepted part of a teacher's professional life. During pre-service training, trainee teachers are observed by their trainers or mentors in the teaching practicum (Farr, 2011). Once qualified, in-service teachers may be observed by colleagues or supervisors (Allwright, 2014). These observations are generally followed

by a feedback conference. There is much variation in the specific format such a conference may take. Gebhard (1990), for example, identifies seven general approaches, ranging from the highly prescriptive *directive supervision*, to the eclectic mix of supervisory behaviors identified as *creative supervision*. While such labeling of approaches may be useful, the exact nature of the interaction between the supervisor and teacher during feedback may depend on a number of factors, such as the supervisor's expectations about the teacher, or the teachers' and supervisors' beliefs about the supervision process (Louw, Watson Todd & Jimarkon, 2016).

It is not clear how much importance the observation and the subsequent feedback conference are given in teachers' professional lives in teaching contexts divorced from academia. As with other theory-practice dichotomies, the description of the observation and feedback process born from well-informed academic approaches in idealized teaching and learning environments may be far removed from practice in schools. One such setting is Cambodia, where recent history has disrupted regulation of educational institutions. English language teaching in Cambodia was re-introduced after its ban during the civil war and the years immediately following it. The rebuilding of Cambodia's English language education saw major growth in the late 1990s at a point where the government of Cambodia was focused on other more pressing reconstruction issues. Since then, English language teaching has been supplied by schools with marginal government regulation (Igawa, 2008) and almost exclusively as the remit of private language schools, private universities, and private primary and secondary bilingual schools, which are driven by demand. In this educational environment, successful schools respond to immediate market needs, in isolation from international trends in educational practice. As such, Cambodia's current English language teaching milieu provides a snapshot of education at the service of market forces with limited reference to theory (Saroeun, 2015). Being unregulated and undirected, schools in Cambodia offer an honest look into what happens in practice removed from theory and without institutionalized systems.

Given there are no requirements for schools in Cambodia to conduct supervisory observations, the purpose of this study was to investigate whether classroom observation and subsequent feedback are utilized by private schools as tools of in-service teacher supervision. Specifically, we aimed to investigate the extent to which observations and feedback are used in these schools, the purposes ascribed to them by both the supervising observers, and also by the school's in-service teachers.

## **2. Supervisory observations and feedback on teaching**

Extensive literature is available on issues of teacher supervision, classroom observations and the delivery of feedback following an observation in the context of teacher education and supervision.

Literature addressing issues in classroom observations have included the observer effect on the classroom (Keegan, 2014; Rees, 1997), the nature of data collection during the lesson (Bunton, Stimpson & Lopez-Real, 2002; Wajnryb, 1992), and differences in who conducts the observation (Yüksel, 2011). On giving feedback following the observation, research



has investigated the timing of feedback after the lesson (Watson & Williams, 2004), the role of classroom data during the feedback (Walsh & Mann, 2015), the development of trust (Chamberlin, 2000), authority during the feedback conference (Louw et al., 2016), and the nature good feedback (Brandt, 2008).

An important influence on the observation and feedback process is the purpose ascribed to it by participants. Farr (2011) identifies four distinct purposes for supervisory feedback: teacher evaluation, identifying avenues for offering direction, allowing for teacher catharsis, and developing reflective practice. For each of these goals, Farr identifies specific language participants use, and contrasting outcomes the participants set out to achieve.

First, the evaluation purpose is possibly what teachers most commonly associate with observation and feedback. In pre-service settings, the observations form part of a gatekeeping role given to observers, in which students failing to meet some required minimum criteria can be excluded from the profession (Boote, 2003). In-service observations serve a quality control purpose, where the observer decides how closely a teacher meets prescribed performance criteria (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016). In both cases, observations serve as summative evaluation, with the teacher judged against predetermined criteria, often isolated as discrete elements (Leshem & Bar-Hama, 2008).

Second, observation and feedback also serve to facilitate remedial intervention on perceived weaknesses, or what Farr (2011) labels giving direction. If seen as a series of discrete skills, teaching can be mastered by remediating shortcomings in teachers' performances, and using master teachers as models of the ultimate outcome. In this sense, observations serve a formative evaluation role, where the observer's evaluation acts as the basis for determining areas for further training or remediation.

The evaluation and direction purposes of classroom observations conform to what Freeman (1990) calls a *training* orientation to the education and supervision of teachers. In this training perspective, teaching is seen as a series of discrete, identifiable behaviors that teachers can learn (through direction) and master, and thus be evaluated on. Such discrete behaviors, such as eliciting or managing the class, are fixed and certain techniques can be identified as preferable to others. In a training approach, knowledge and skills originate in the expert (a trainer, director or supervisor), and can be transmitted to the teacher if the conditions are favorable.

The third purpose of feedback is its potential for the development of the emotional well-being of the teacher (Farr, 2011). Teaching can be a highly emotional experience, filled with frustration and elation alike. Feedback following an observation provides a platform for interpersonal discourse and exchanges that can bring about emotional equilibrium, and develop professional relations in the context of the school or classroom. This is particularly necessary where teachers are nervous or lacking in confidence, where a supervisor may use the feedback as an opportunity to support the teacher, build trust, and develop teachers' personal or professional identity (Randall & Thornton, 2001). However, the observation and feedback itself may be a source of intense anxiety, especially when associated with

evaluation (Brandt, 2008). These concerns may mean that while feedback serves the purpose of building rapport or affect, its implementation requires careful management (Vasquez, 2004).

Finally, observation and feedback provide a platform for reflection. Following Vygotskian principles, the opportunity for a teacher to share ideas and specific experiences with a (more experienced and knowledgeable) colleague can lead to the co-construction of new understandings, and create unique insights for teachers as they explore their professional identity (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Dewey (1910) and Schön (1983) were influential in establishing the notion of reflection as an essential component of teacher development. Through reflection, teachers create unique perspectives of their teaching context, the challenges they face, and the resources available to them, thus creating for themselves a specific 'professional competence' (Wallace, 1991, p 58), giving teachers greater ownership of their decisions, and allowing for greater creativity in dealing with the unique nature of each classroom environment.

A reflective orientation to feedback on observed lessons recognizes that the training approach falls short of achieving long term change in teachers because it ignores the capricious mix of interpersonal factors in the classroom. Teacher personality, confidence, experience and personal beliefs interact with a range of student factors such as mood, language ability, and personal preference to create a highly personal and unique learning environment that cannot be generalized by the referencing of 'master' teachers' approaches or behavior. Reflection, then, forms the basis of a *developmental* approach in which teachers explore the personal parameters of their own specific teaching contexts (Freeman, 1990). In terms of teacher supervision, in-service settings are well-suited to a developmental approach, given that teachers have greater background knowledge, are more familiar with their students, and understand their own teaching environments more thoroughly than a visiting observer (Bailey, 2006; Freeman, 1990).

The successful utilization of reflection in feedback for teacher development is dependent on the negotiation of goals and honest, non-judgmental dialogue of individual, and possibly conflicting, perspectives. Such dialogue implies a symmetrical power relationship in the discourse. For successful reflective dialogue, therefore, the teachers' affective response matters. Teacher anxiety in the feedback dialogue may lead to defensive posturing or even open conflict, which has a negative impact on reflection (Brandt, 2008; Louw, Watson Todd & Jimarkon, 2013). A training approach rests on an assumption that the observer has power to evaluate or direct, and thus can impose evaluation on the teacher. A development approach, however, takes the view that the teacher's voice has value, and that the observer can be beneficial in drawing from the teacher alternative perspectives or new insights. Therefore, the success of reflective dialogue relies on a trusting, egalitarian relationship between observers and teachers.

Given the different purposes observations and feedback may serve, and the potentially contradicting goals of the training and development approaches, there is a scope for variation in how the observation and feedback process is put to use in different settings. We therefore aimed to answer the following questions:



1. To what extent do private English-medium schools in Cambodia utilize classroom observations, and implement in-service supervisory feedback?
2. What purpose(s) do teachers ascribe to observations and feedback.
3. What purpose(s) do the supervising observers ascribe to observations and feedback.

### **3. Methodology**

#### ***3.1 Data collection***

To explore observation and feedback from the perspective of both teachers and their supervisors, data needed to be collected from both groups. As a greater number of teachers than supervisors are available for sampling, data collection for the two groups was approached differently.

For the teachers, a questionnaire investigated three broad questions about classroom observations. The first section, investigated the frequency of observations. The second gauged teachers' affective responses to the observations and feedback. Using Farr's (2011) four purposes for feedback, the third section explored what Cambodian teachers see as the purposes of observations and the feedback conference.

#### ***3.2 Data analysis***

The questionnaire, based around that reported in Farr (2011), comprised of three parts with a total of 56 questions. To account for the non-native English speaker status of the teachers involved, Farr's original sentence evaluations were expanded into a series of distinct multiple-choice items, and additional questions added to ensure coverage of the research questions. The questionnaire was piloted with five non-native speakers of English. Evidence from this pilot indicated that seven items were misinterpreted, possibly as a result of phrasing, and these items were deleted.

The questionnaires were distributed to teachers at four large, private English language schools; two in Phnom Penh and two in Siem Reap. These schools offer English-medium programs from kindergarten through to grade 12, taught by a mix of Cambodian and expatriate teachers. Of 70 questionnaires, 47 were returned. Of these, six were completed by non-Cambodian teachers, and were therefore excluded since the data fell outside focus of this research, leaving 41 questionnaires for the analysis. This small return is clearly a limitation of this study, as it is clearly not representative of all teaching situations in Cambodia. However, the data from four different schools provides a useful window into this aspect of teachers' lives in Cambodian schools. The percentage of responses to each item on the questionnaire was calculated.

To gain an institutional perspective on the observations, supervisors from two of the schools were interviewed, one each in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. The interviews took place in the school during school hours, and each lasted around 15 minutes. A semi-structured interview protocol was followed. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer aims to cover a set of themes or topics, but the order and depth with which these are covered is

governed by the response of the interviewee (Dörnyei, 2007). The supervisors were asked about the frequency of observations in their schools, teachers' feelings about observations and feedback, and purposes for these in the school. These interviews were conducted in English, and were transcribed for analysis. The data was analyzed specifically to answer the research questions: the frequency of observations and feedback, teachers' affective response to observations and feedback, and the supervisors' perception of the purpose of observations and feedback.

## 4. Findings

This section divides the findings of the questionnaire by three themes: the procedure for observations in schools, teachers' affective response to observations and feedback, and perceived purposes for the observation and feedback. For each, perspectives from the supervisors will be given through excerpts from their interviews as a way of highlighting the degree of congruence between teachers' and supervisors' responses.

### 4.1 Classroom Observations in Cambodia

The first part of the questionnaire focused on procedural elements of observations and feedback in Cambodian schools. Teachers report observations happening frequently (regularly (40%), more than once a year (26%)) and most often conducted by the director or head teacher. 43% of the teachers report that they choose the lesson to be observed. Where the observer chooses the lesson, 29% of teachers are notified in advance, and 20% report the observation is a surprise. In the majority of classes (60%), only part of the lesson is observed.

Supervisors largely confirmed these findings. Both supervisors report that observations are part of their responsibility and are conducted regularly. One supervisor described a system of informing teachers before the lesson, but in the second school teachers are not notified of the observation:

*"Then we get inside the classroom without telling the teachers first. We just pop inside the classroom. And then we observe."*

*(Interview 2, turn 2)*

Incongruous with the teacher data, however, both supervisors reported that the entire lesson is observed.

There is some indication in these findings that observations are bureaucratically imposed rather than a negotiated and democratic event. Such hierarchical imposition of observations on teachers may have implications for the affective response teachers have to the observation and feedback process.

### 4.2 Affective response Observation

Table 1 reports the teachers' perceptions on being observed. The findings indicate that teachers are largely positive about the observation and feedback; nearly half of them reporting that they 'like' observations, and the remaining respondents indicating that

the observation and feedback were ‘okay’. Teachers report acting ‘normal’ or feeling ‘confident’ during the observed lesson, and feel ‘encouraged’ or ‘respected’ during the feedback conference.

**Table 1** Teachers’ affective response to observation and feedback

Teacher Perception	Emotion during observation	Emotion during feedback	Desired Frequency
OK: 55.00%	Normal: 54.76%	Encouraged: 69.76%	Less: 51.28%
Like: 45.00%	Confident: 38.09%	Respected: 20.93%	More: 33.33%
Don’t like: 00.00%	Nervous: 16.66%	Curious: 04.65%	Other: 10.25%

The generally positive response to the observations is contrary to our own personal experience with teachers’ reactions to observations. Indeed, there is evidence in the data of report bias. Over half the teachers indicated that they would prefer fewer observations. Given that the teachers report feeling ‘normal’ and ‘encouraged’, this preference for fewer observations may hint at teachers’ ambivalence towards observation and feedback, in which observations are both embraced and feared.

This ambivalence to observations is also reflected in the interview data from the supervisors. One supervisor reports that teachers *‘feel happy’* when it is time for their observation because it is an opportunity to *‘improve the students’ learning only’*. Later in the same interview, however, the supervisor admits that teachers are not necessarily enthusiastic about observation:

*“Mm you know most of the teachers if they know that, er, today we are going to observe them, they teach carefully.”*

*(Interview 1, turn 40)*

Similarly, the second supervisor:

*“Normally when we come in the teachers feel nervous I think. They talk in the way in which they feel nervous.”*

*(Interview 2, turn 16)*

Overall, then, while the teachers report either positive or neutral responses to their observations on the questionnaire, there is evidence that observations represent a source of anxiety. The basis of this anxiety may relate to what the teachers see as the purpose of the observations, which was the focus of the next stage of our analysis.

#### **4.3 Purposes of observation and feedback**

Table 2 summarizes the key findings from the questionnaires relating to the teachers’ perceptions of the purposes of classroom observations in their schools.

**Table 2** Perceived purposes of observation and feedback

Teachers' perspective of the purpose(s) of <i>observation</i>	Teachers' perspective of the purpose(s) of <i>feedback</i>
Job requirement: 46.66%	Highlight weaknesses: 44.64%
To help me: 44.44%	Get advice: 28.57%
To demonstrate for others: 08.88%	Highlight strengths: 21.42%

Teachers see the observations as either a bureaucratic necessity, or as an opportunity to get help for their lessons, and feedback as an opportunity to identify weaknesses in their teaching, get advice, and find out about their strengths. These findings are consistent with a training approach to feedback, in which the teachers see their role in feedback as that of receiving evaluative comments and direction from an expert. Items indicating reflection as a purpose for feedback were ignored by the teachers completing the survey.

The interviews with the supervisors highlight even more clearly the evaluative and directive nature of observation and feedback. One supervisor was very specific about the purposes of the observation and feedback from the perspective of the school:

*“So we observe the teacher, we find out what they need, especially the weak points, and we [look for ways to] correct all the main points. And after we observe we call them to [meet] face to face to tell them what they need to correct.”*

*(Interview 1, turn 6)*

In this school, the observation revolves around the teachers' weaknesses and how these can be corrected. Later in the same interview, the supervisor details how the evaluation and direction is delivered to the teacher:

*“[I say] don't think that I'm here to observe you to fire you, to find your mistake. I would like you to teach the student what you want them to understand, what you [want] them to know, so be a good teacher, understand your position, your job responsibility.”*

*(Interview 1, turn 28)*

In this supervisor's conception of the feedback process, 'good teaching' is an achievable goal, and the supervisor is tasked with facilitating this through his observations.

The second interview highlighted similar sentiments:

*“Okay so normally after the lesson is finished we talk to the teachers right away, we do not wait until the teachers forget. We tell the weaknesses and strengths of the teachers, we tell the teachers do not feel embarrassed, this is okay, the way we need to improve ourselves.”*

*(Interview 2, turn 18)*



This supervisor is unequivocal in his approach to the feedback. The observation serves to identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses, so these can be brought to the teacher's attention, the focus being on the improvement of the teacher.

Overall, the results indicate that observations and feedback are heavily focused on the training purposes of directing and evaluating, and specifically with the identification of shortcomings of teachers' performance according to prescribed teaching practice.

## 5. Discussion

Our first goal of the study was to investigate the extent to which observations are a part of in-service Cambodian teachers' professional routines. The findings indicate that observations are regularly conducted and are followed by a feedback conference with the teacher. Overall, the picture that emerges from these schools is that observations are conducted by the head teacher, who decides on what lesson is to be observed, and in some cases enters the classroom unannounced. Classroom observations and the subsequent feedback are, therefore, bureaucratically imposed.

The imposed nature of observations and feedback implies a highly hierarchical environment in which these teachers and their supervisors work. There is, therefore, unlikely to be a negotiation of goals, as suggested by clinical approaches to observation (Gebhard, 1990). More pertinent, the approach taken by the observers speaks of a highly evaluative goal favoring quality control rather than teacher development. Proponents of teacher development (Chamberlin, 2000; Korhagen, 2004) argue that the development of teacher competencies rely on holistic approaches which uncover teachers' beliefs through reflection and dialogue, best done in an egalitarian environment which engenders trust. Our finding that supervisors in Cambodian schools do not consult with teachers on the purposes or timing of the observations is an indication of evaluative rather than developmental supervisor-teacher interaction, and the possibility that teachers' affective concerns are marginalized.

Our second goal was to explore the teachers' affective response to the observations. Considering the hierarchical implementation of observations, the finding that teachers either 'like' or are 'OK' with the observations and feedback was somewhat surprising. There are two indications that the finding is spurious: first, that the teachers would prefer to have fewer observations; and second, the references in the supervisors' interviews of the challenges observations and feedback create for teachers. Though the data indicates teachers feel comfortable with the observations, this clearly does not capture the teachers' full affective response. This finding of a positive affective response to observations may, therefore, reflect a response bias in the questionnaire data (Dornyei & Taguchi, 2009), which might be attributable to social desirability bias. Respondents, seeing that we were interested in observations, may have felt constrained to report more positive feelings than they really have. Such threats to face validity are an unfortunate part of questionnaire studies, especially where the results are unsupported by interview data (Broca, 2015).

The third focus of the study was an investigation into the purposes to which observations and feedback are put in these schools. Teachers report observations to be a job requirement rather than as a means of improving their classroom practice or developing as teachers. Data from the supervisors casts observations and feedback in a higher stakes light; observations are not only bureaucratically required, but serve as a quality control mechanism.

*“... I tell them in here we work for the benefit. If our student decrease so our .. if our school decrease the student so our benefit decrease also, so our business is not success. So if our student to increase, our benefits increase as well, the environment of the school will be happy, so I let them know well about what objective of the business of the school.”*

*(Interview 1, turn 34)*

For supervisors, observations and feedback are opportunities not only to improve teachers' practice, but to maintain the school's reputation. Both of these purposes conform to a training orientation.

Notably absent in both the data from both the teachers and observers is any reference to teacher reflection. In the questionnaires, the teachers specifically indicated that there was no option for sharing opinions in the feedback. Reflection as a purpose in the feedback was also omitted from the supervisors' data, prompting the interviewer (SL) to focus specifically in the interviews on the role of the teachers' dialogue during the feedback:

*SL: Does the teacher say anything?*

*Supervisor 2: Ok so normally when I conduct the feedback, the teacher tends to have few ideas, so they don't participate and sometimes when I first conduct the [feedback] I ask them questions relating to management, they could not answer all the questions*

*(Interview 2, turns 23-24)*

This supervisor rejects the idea of eliciting the teachers' ideas during the feedback. To him, teachers' contributions are neither forthcoming nor useful: teachers have little to say in feedback, and are not knowledgeable enough in teaching methodology to make meaningful contributions. Instead, a specific 'right' answer is assumed, and a discussion about classroom possibilities or the teacher's own perspective of the lesson is not a relevant goal. Equally, the teachers appear to be hesitant to express their own possible responses or challenge the supervisor with any interpretation of their own understanding of the classroom events. The process of reflecting on lessons and sharing perspectives with a fellow professional, therefore, is one which is given no consideration.

The literature on teacher supervision is replete with arguments in favor of reflection as a tool for pre-service teacher preparation, and in-service teacher development, arguing it to be an influential means of empowering teachers, encouraging them to explore their beliefs, evaluate classroom happenings, and effectively self-evaluate the effectiveness of



their teaching practice (Farrell, 2014, Larrivee, 2000; Marcos, Miguel & Tillema, 2009; Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Roberts, 1998). Pennington (1990), for example, claims that a reflective orientation improves classroom processes and outcomes, and leads to more confidence and self-motivation among teachers. The absence of evidence of reflection, then, would indicate an over-emphasis on evaluation and direction, and therefore a devaluing of the long-term goals of teachers' professional development. On this issue, Freeman (1990) argues that *a training strategy, when it is used exclusively, can lead to an overemphasis on teaching skills and behaviors at the expense of developing the teacher's independent resources and capacity to take charge of what he or she is doing.* (p. 103)

Despite the strong academic support for reflection, reflective approaches to feedback on observed lessons in Cambodia appear to be uncommon within these schools. We posit four possible explanations for this failure of reflection in Cambodian teacher supervision: first, the issue of Cambodia's academic isolation; second, issues inherent in the nature of reflection; third, issues relating to the management of private schools; and fourth, a mismatch between the culture of Cambodia and the principles of reflection.

The first possible explanation for a failure for reflection in Cambodian classrooms may lie in the academic remove in which these teachers work. Because of the collapse of its academic infrastructure during its recent history, Cambodia has been isolated from developments in academia (Igawa, 2008; Roberts, 2016). Reflection and reflective practice has become the focus of academic interest in teacher preparation and practice since Schon's (1983) publication of *The reflective practitioner*, at which time English language teaching and learning were still prohibited in Cambodia. In addition, the disconnect between academic ideals and actual classroom practice may also relate to the larger debate on the separation of theory and practice (Maley, 2016), in which teachers in private schools such as these work to meet market forces, perhaps not even aware of academic ideals proposed in the literature. This divide between theory and practice could be exacerbated in the case of Cambodia where even as tertiary institutions currently struggle to raise awareness of current practice, private schools such as the ones which form the focus of this research, remain almost entirely unregulated. That Cambodia has been separated from a focus on a developmental approach to teacher supervision, therefore, may serve as a possible explanation for the failure of a reflective focus with both teachers and supervisors.

A second possible cause for the failure of reflection is the endemic nature of reflection itself. As a tool, reflection is not well understood, poorly defined, and not easily measured (Akbari, 2007; Walsh & Mann, 2015), so that even in institutions purporting reflective practice, there exists the possibility of reflective practice as a slogan, unsupported by real evidence of reflection in practice (Etscheidt, Curran & Sawyer, 2012). Given that the premise of reflection is a personal consideration of valuable elements of the lesson, clarification of reflection and its implementation is vague and difficult to systematize: what exactly constitutes reflection may depend on the nature of the individual's beliefs and natural tendencies towards introspection. Without firm delineation of reflection, or guidelines for trainers and supervisors to evaluate or promote reflection, reflective practice may continue to be imperfectly implemented. In coalface environments remote

from academia and without access to developments in theory, the possibility of successful reflective practice is even further threatened.

A third possible explanation might lie with the nature of these schools in themselves. At the coalface in busy, market-driven private schools, reflective practice has much working against it. For supervisors in these schools, reflection stands threatened by the daily demands of supervising a staff of teachers, dealing with high teacher turnover, and a student population of over 1000 students. Under these conditions, there is little motivation to work towards teachers' long term development.

*"[I] explain [and] advice them to know why you come here what [we] want teachers [to] do. We will invite the teacher to talk about this [and] tell them. After that, if they [do] not change, the last choice [is] we stop them."*

*(Interview 1, turn 32)*

Throughout the interviews, it is clear that the supervisors do not make it their goal to negotiate teacher development with teachers individually, but rather that teachers are expected only to follow the school regulations and fulfil their job responsibilities. For both teachers and the supervisors, there is pressure to maintain an academic standard which can be easily implemented in the fast-paced and under-resourced environments in which the teachers work.

A fourth argument for the failure of reflection as part of the feedback process takes the perspective of Cambodia's cultural milieu. Our data clearly shows how observations are bureaucratically imposed on the teachers by the school management, and how teachers are satisfied with feedback without any reference to their own views or perspectives of the classes involved. Teachers are given little control over the scheduling of the observations, and in some cases are not informed at all of a scheduled observation. It is apparent that the supervisor has complete control over the observation, and over what is considered valuable for discussion in the feedback. This hierarchical approach is inconsistent with traditional conceptions of clinical supervision. Gebhard's (1990) description of clinical supervision includes clear involvement of teacher through the selection of foci. Similarly, Schon's (1983) description of reflection involves the expert using the novice's description of the problem as a point of departure for the exchange of ideas. A feedback meeting dominated by the supervisor's ideas conforms to an authoritative exchange (Bakhtin, 1981), one in which co-construction of new ideas for developmental change through dialogue is unlikely to occur.

The roots of this authoritative approach to teacher supervision may lie in cultural responses to power in dialogue. Hofstede (1986) argues that culture plays an important role in interaction in educational scenarios. Hofstede's describes five constituents of culture: power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and long term orientation. South East Asian cultures are categorized as collective and display high power distance (Blunt & Turner, 2005). In collectivist cultures, the individual is integrated into strong in-groups which look after their interests and demand unquestioning loyalty. Power



distance is the “extent to which the less powerful persons in a society accept inequality in power and consider it as normal” (Hofstede, 1986, p. 307). In high power distance cultures, followers endorse unequal power distribution. These cultures, then, experience greater inequality, and those not in power will accept a position of dependence.

High power distance, however, is not compatible with an egalitarian environment implied by a developmental approach to teacher feedback. The shared exploration of success or failure in a lesson by a teacher and supervisor which is understood in a reflective dialogue sits uncomfortably with the loyalty and submission demanded by a high power distance relationship. The appropriacy of reflective practice in Asian contexts has been addressed elsewhere (Wanda, Wilson & Fowler, 2014), with reflective approaches considered a technique from the ‘west’ incompatible with Asian values. For example, Minnis (1999) argues that the assumptions underlying reflection are incomparable with the Malay-Islamic cultural values in Brunei. Similarly, with the expectation in Cambodian society of conformity to a status hierarchy, it might be considered unacceptable for the inferior interlocutor to question or challenge the superior.

## 6. Conclusion

This was as a small-scale exploratory study of the nature of observations and feedback in private schools in Cambodia. The findings indicate that observations and feedback form part of the teachers’ routine life, but that these serve a training rather than a development function, and thus prioritize short-term quality needs relevant to the schools’ agenda over the possible needs or concerns of the teachers.

In this training capacity, the observer serves as evaluator of a teacher’s practice to identify areas of the teacher’s skills which indicate a lack of mastery, and offers direction on how these may be rectified. In this quality control role, the observer is invested with both expertise and position power (Bailey, 2006). Absent is the development function in which the supervisor serves as cooperative colleague who can promote self-evaluation and reflection in a supportive and non-threatening context.

We have proposed that a paradigm in which reflective practice may thrive is inconsistent with the current institutional milieu in which these teachers are working. This may be a result of the theoretical distance in which these teachers work from mainstream academic acceptance of reflective practice, or the incompatibility of reflection with either the traits of Cambodian national culture or the fast-paced school cultures in which the data was collected. The high power distance characteristic of Cambodian national culture may be a poor fit with the dialogic interaction and exchange of views implied in reflective supervision. From the perspective of school culture, the likely focus of both administrators and teachers on the need to proceed with their immediate duties successfully may also undermine the possibility of successful reflection. While reflection has studies to support its usefulness, a teacher on the ground is more likely to be concerned with keeping both the school administration and students happy than in attempting to become a holistic human.

A limitation of the findings here is the small-scale nature of the study. With only 40 respondents, and four schools, the study can not be said to be representative of the teacher supervision practices across all Cambodian schools. Nevertheless, further research on the relationship between culture and reflection is warranted. Perhaps a useful avenue for future pilot studies would focus on the ‘top’ in this top down driven agenda of observations, from the school owners and directors, rather than the middle or bottom.

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