INTERROGATING PLOTLINES IN INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION:
A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE
PEDAGOGY IN CAMBODIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

By

CHRISTOPHER MYSCHOWODA

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ABSTRACT

The present narrative inquiry examines the stories of one Western instructor at a university in Cambodia. As universities in Southeast Asia follow trends in the internationalisation of higher education by using English as a medium of instruction, internationalising curricula, and recruiting expatriate instructors, the issue of culturally responsive pedagogy is increasingly important for promoting effective and ethical education. The present paper consists of narratives deemed emblematic of many of the issues in the literature on culturally responsive pedagogy. Through the use of concepts derived from intercultural communication theory, these emblematic narratives are used to interrogate many of the common themes in this body of research and to explore emergent themes related to the experience of developing a culturally responsive pedagogy based on the author’s own experiences.
INTRODUCTION

Cambodian higher education has witnessed increasing privatisation over the past decade. Many of its private universities have sought to brand themselves as international by using English as the medium of instruction, internationalising curricula, and recruiting expatriate instructors.¹ With these changes have come new intercultural learning environments in Cambodia. Expatriate instructors and Cambodian students, with their often widely different cultural backgrounds, are now working together to achieve educational objectives. This is not always an easy partnership, and it is unrealistic to expect either side to simply bracket their cultural backgrounds. For the sake of effective and ethical education, it is therefore important to investigate the specific challenges of the intercultural classroom and the strategies used to overcome cultural conflict in education without yielding to stereotypes based on generalisations related to culture.

Many studies have looked at the role of culture in education. These include investigations of the qualities students think expatriate instructors need to be successful in Southeast Asia (Cannon, 1991) and China (Zhang & Watkins, 2007), the difficulties Asian students face in learning Western conventions of academic writing (Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999), the process of student adaptation to new cultural environments (Watson, 1998), the differences between Asian and Western learning styles (Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001), the strategies instructors can use to overcome cultural fatigue, (Donahue & Parsons, 1982), the role of culture in learning languages such as English (Atkinson, 1999),
and more. At the same time, several expatriate scholars have studied specific
intercultural learning environments in largely monocultural classrooms in
countries ranging from Puerto Rico (MacLennan, 2000), to Hong Kong (Bodycott
& Walker, 2000), to Brazil (Crabtree & Sapp, 2004), to Egypt (Garson, 2005), to
Nigeria (Viranten et al., 2006), and to Thailand (Fergusson, 2008).

Following many of these studies, the present paper utilises intercultural
communication theory as a framework to investigate the challenges of teaching
at one private university in Cambodia and the strategies adopted in response to
many of these challenges. At the same time, it attempts to interrogate some of
the recurring plotlines in the intercultural education literature and to highlight
emergent themes based on one instructor’s own personal experience. This paper
differs from many others, however, in making explicit use of the method of
narrative inquiry. Using narrative inquiry shows how teacher knowledge is
composed of narratives, how these narratives are embodied in a person, and
how these narratives are situated within specific cultural and institutional
contexts. The result is not merely a list of instructional strategies, but an
affirmation of the need for a dynamic, culturally responsive pedagogy that
responds to the ever evolving context of concrete intercultural encounters in the
classroom.

The present paper is organised as follows. First, I define some of the key
terms relevant to the research, including international education, intercultural
communication, intercultural competence, and culturally responsive pedagogy.
Next, I establish the historical context for my personal narratives by reviewing the
development of higher education in Cambodia, the multiplication of private universities, and the often problematic role of English in higher education. Next, I situate the research in its specific context by describing the institution and the students that are its focus. Finally, I explore several prominent themes in the literature on intercultural education, including the cultural appropriateness of curricula, the implementation of student-centred practices in traditionally teacher-centred educational cultures, the relationship between language and culture, the issue of power in classroom management, and the problem of academic (dis)honesty. Emergent themes in these sections include the navigation of intercultural contact situations as a form of roleplay, the conflict between personal values and cultural relativism, and the tension involved in occupying subject positions, or socio-historically constructed identity categories (Søreide, 2006) that are simultaneously empowering and disempowering. The concluding section considers the broader relevance of case studies such as the present one for the wider community of practitioners in international education.

**KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS**

*International Education*

The internationalisation of higher education consists of a wide range of activities related to scholarship, teaching, research, and institutional management aimed at making students more internationally knowledgeable and interculturally
competent in order to succeed in a world of increasing global interdependence (Stone, 2006: 336-7.; Van Damme, 2001: 418-20).

For many years, international programs were mainly associated with universities in the developed world. Today, the major English-speaking countries (e.g. the United States, Australia, and Britain) still capture almost half of all international students due to their dominance of the international league tables, which rank the world’s universities, and aggressive marketing of courses to overseas students (Graddol, 2006: 74). Yet, the dominance of the major English-speaking countries produces prestige, not only for international programs in those countries, but also for overseas universities and branch campuses offering so-called international programs in English (Graddol, 2006: 74). Thus, the number of students going abroad is falling as students are choosing international programs, often through the medium of English, in their home countries (Graddol, 2006: 76; Crabtree & Sapp, 2004: 106).

Higher education in Cambodia seems to be following this trend. While there are relatively few international branch campuses, many Cambodian universities have established affiliations with counterparts abroad, and while few Cambodian universities recruit international students or establish international research partnerships, they often display three of the main features of internationalisation: the use of English as the medium of instruction, the internationalisation of curricula, and the hiring of expatriate instructors.²
**Intercultural Communication**

The term "culture" is renowned for the variety of its meanings, but for present purposes, it can be defined as the collective values, norms, and attitudes manifest in peoples' behaviour. Culture in this sense is both an aggregate of individual tendencies and an antecedent variable that influences individual tendencies (Singelis & Brown, 1995: 357). Studies in intercultural communication examine how culture influences behaviour, how culture influences the way we interpret behaviour, and how we can learn to communicate more effectively with people from different cultures (Xiao & Petraki, 2007).

Many people trace the development of intercultural communication theory to the work of Edward T. Hall (Rogers et. al, 2002). Approaches from this tradition focus on a number of mostly behavioural concepts related to cultural differences in body movement (kinesics), spatial sense (proxemics), eye movement (oculesics), touching behaviour (haptics), time orientation (chronemics), and paralinguistic features, such as intonation and speech rate (Dahl, n/d: 8-10).

A second figure often credited with the development of intercultural communication theory is Geert Hofstede. With an original sample from forty countries, Hofstede produced a list of four cultural dimensions, quantified these dimensions on scales, and ordered the countries according to their relative positions on these scales. With its basis in cultural values rather than specific behaviours, this approach has enabled researchers to predict and explain many
cultural differences (Matsumoto & Yoo, 2006: 235) and has been influential in studies of both business and education. 4

**Intercultural Competence**

The influence of our own culture often distorts our perceptions of people from other cultures, but coming from different cultural backgrounds does not always doom people to mutual misunderstanding (Hall, 1989: 53). People can acquire the ability to communicate effectively across cultural barriers, an ability generally termed intercultural competence (Stone, 2006: 338). One of the foremost concerns of intercultural communication theory is to explore the nature of the skills required for people to interact successfully with people from other cultures.

According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), developing intercultural competence involves passing through three stages: awareness, knowledge, and skills (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005: 358-61). In the first stage, we recognise the influence of culture on communication; in the second, we acquire specific information about another culture; and in the third, we learn to use awareness and knowledge to improve communication with members of other cultures.

Others have noted that developing awareness and acquiring knowledge depends on possessing certain personal qualities, such as motivation, openness, resilience, reflectiveness, and sensitivity, many of which are learnable (Stone, 2006: 345). Thus, intercultural competence can also be achieved by fostering
personal qualities such as sensitivity and openness through repeated contact with unfamiliar cultural territory (Bolten, 1993: 342-3; Otten, 2003: 20-1).

**Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

With the rise of internationalisation in education has come a profusion of intercultural learning environments worldwide. These environments include classrooms with diverse immigrant populations, classrooms that include international students, and classrooms like those in Cambodia with relatively homogenous student populations but expatriate instructors (Crabtree & Sapp, 2004: 106).

Meeting the challenges of these intercultural learning environments requires specific skills that instructors “cannot be expected to possess on the basis of their general academic background, which they have acquired by and large under national conditions” (Teekens, 2003: 112-3). These are skills related to intercultural competence, but specifically developed within the context of education. The application of these skills is therefore commonly termed culturally responsive pedagogy.

Studies of culturally responsive pedagogy generally parallel the two means of achieving intercultural competence. The first of these means is acquiring specific information about another culture, and many studies of teaching in intercultural learning environments are like recipe books of strategies to respond to students from various cultures, focusing on specific ways to, for example, encourage discussion, select appropriate class texts, or design
assessment instruments (e.g. Bergeron, 2008; Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Crabtree & Sapp, 2004; Garson, 2005; MacLennan, 2000; Singh & Doherty, 2004).

The other means of achieving intercultural competence is fostering personal qualities that lead to greater awareness of cultural differences, and the parallel approach to culturally responsive pedagogy involves identifying characteristics of instructors who are effective in responding to cultural differences in general. Examples of this approach include Teekens’ (2003) portrait of the ideal international educator, Jiang’s (2001) list of six general “principles for perceiving and handling culture bumps” in the classroom, Sowden’s (2007) “profile of the ‘good teacher’” in an intercultural context, and Ladson-Billings’ (1995) description of “culturally relevant pedagogy.”

Just as culture-general skills such as the ability to respond with openness and sensitivity to cultural differences and culture-specific skills such as the ability to use the knowledge that it is impolite to touch people on the head in some Asian cultures are two pathways to intercultural competence, these two approaches to culturally responsive pedagogy, one emphasising particular strategies to adapt to specific groups of learners, the other emphasising general orientations toward the self, students, and learning, are both relevant to anyone seeking to adapt to intercultural learning environments.
BACKGROUND

Cambodian Culture as Context

Although Cambodia was not included in Hofstede’s survey of the cultures of seventy-four countries and regions, Cambodia is likely positioned similarly to other Southeast Asian countries with regard to Hofstede’s five main cultural orientations. Two of Cambodia’s neighbours, Thailand and Vietnam, were among the countries included in Hofstede’s survey, and despite major social, political, economic, and historical differences, the two countries rank close to each other and most other Southeast Asian countries on all five cultural dimensions.

Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam have much in common, including Cambodia and Vietnam’s colonial heritage, and Cambodia and Thailand’s Theravada Buddhist tradition. All three countries share relatively low levels of economic development and geographic positions near the equator, which are factors correlated with high Power Distance and Collectivism (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2000: 69, 110). There are also large ethnic minority populations from these and other Asian countries in Cambodia. Cambodia has a Vietnamese minority; border regions of Thailand are ethnically Khmer; border regions of Cambodia were strongly influenced by years of Thai occupation; and the Cambodian capital, like the Thai capital, has a large number of ethnic Chinese who attend Chinese schools, learn Mandarin, and preserve their traditions, bringing a Confucian element, similar to neighbouring Vietnam, to both countries.
Compared to the “Anglo” countries, most Asian countries, including Cambodia’s neighbours Thailand and Vietnam, are positioned on opposite poles of a number of Hofstede’s cultural orientations. The largest differences are related to Collectivism, Power Distance, and Long-Term Orientation, with Asian countries generally ranking higher than “Anglo” countries on all of these dimensions. The dimension of Uncertainty Avoidance is unusual insofar as the “Anglo” countries rank alongside such Asian countries as Thailand in the middle of the range, while most other Southeast Asian countries including Vietnam rank slightly lower than average. With regard to Masculinity-Femininity, most Southeast Asian countries, including Thailand and Vietnam, rank as slightly more Feminine than the “Anglo” countries, though other Asian countries, such as China, rate as slightly more Masculine.

For the purposes of the present paper, the two most significant dimensions are Power Distance and Collectivism. Cambodia is likely to rank as relatively high on both these dimensions. Generalisations related to family, the workplace, and the state in countries with such an orientation seem to match Cambodian culture. In Collectivist cultures, group harmony is important, high-context communication prevails, people display greater interdependence, and families play a central role in selecting marriage partners for young people (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2000: 82-113). High Power Distance can be seen in the way people expect inequalities, children are taught obedience, young people are encouraged to show respect to older people, and power goes hand-in-hand with status (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2000: 51-70).
On the other hand, many of the other generalisations particularly with regard to Uncertainty Avoidance, Femininity, and Long-Term Orientation, only seem partially to match Cambodian culture. This mismatch indicates the tentativeness of generalisations based on Hofstede’s cultural dimensions. Most countries are located in the middle ranges of most dimensions, as is the case with the majority of Asian countries with regard to Uncertainty Avoidance and Masculinity-Femininity, and so would not be expected to display all of the attributes commonly associated with the extreme poles of those dimensions. Although Vietnam, with its Confucian heritage, is closer to China at the top of the rankings for Long-Term Orientation, other Southeast countries, such as Thailand, while still higher than the “Anglo” countries, are closer to the middle, which is where Cambodia is likely positioned.

Cambodia’s likely cultural orientation also warrants a number of generalisations related to education. These generalisations, particularly with regard to Power Distance and Collectivism, seem strikingly resonant given my own experience in Cambodian schools and universities. In Collectivistic and high Power Distance contexts, students generally display respect toward instructors; classes are more often teacher-centered; students rarely offer independent opinions or voice criticism of instructors’ views; and an instructor’s excellence is thought to be dependent on his or her personal qualities (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2000: 53-5, 96-9). A number of generalisations related to high Uncertainty Avoidance also seem to reflect the situation in Cambodian universities. It is unclear whether this reflects a high Uncertainty Avoidance orientation in
Cambodia or is related to other factors. Students in high Uncertainty Avoidance cultures generally favour clear guidelines and timetables; they prefer questions with definitely correct answers; and instructors are expected to have the answers to every question (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2000: 178-9).

For the remaining cultural dimensions, the generalisations related to education in Feminine cultures and Long-Term Orientation cultures seem only partly to match my experience in Cambodia. Cambodia is typically Masculine in many ways, such as segregation according to gender for jobs, and in education, the almost absolute rule that only females can teach young children (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2000: 140), but its neighbours tend toward Femininity, and Thailand is the most Feminine of all Asian cultures (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2000: 138). The ways in which Femininity finds expression in education are the tendency to avoid aggression, shrink from intense competitiveness, and seek friendliness in instructors (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2000: 136-9). For education, the main characteristic of a Long-Term Orientation, where Cambodia is likely to rank in the middle, is simply the belief that hard work is the path to success (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2000: 215).

The foregoing discussion of Cambodian culture is not meant to be comprehensive, but simply to indicate how Cambodia is likely positioned relative to the “Anglo” countries and other Asian countries with regard to Hofstede’s five cultural dimensions. Culture is a complex, layered, multiple phenomenon, and in concrete situations, people simultaneously belong to multiple cultural units ranging from national, regional, organisational, and occupational subcultures, the
influence of which is mediated by a variety of personal, situational, and structural variables (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005: 10-11, 284-5). Although national culture cannot be imputed as the direct cause of any specific behaviours with absolute certainty, an overview of Cambodian culture, through the lens of Hofstede’s cultural dimensions, permits a number of assumptions related to classroom behaviours commonly associated with certain cultural orientations. These assumptions, when compared with actual experience, form the basis of one possible way of interpreting the origins of specific classroom interactions, but any cultural influence is likely mediated by other factors related to among other things the university, the experiences of the students, and the specificity of our interpersonal interactions.

**Cambodian Education as Context**

Few countries have gone through so many radical changes as Cambodia. Beginning with the French colonial period, through independence, the Khmer Rouge, the Vietnamese occupation, and Western reconstruction, the country’s education system has been built up, destroyed, and rebuilt again by several foreign powers. Many of the challenges faced in the intercultural classrooms of present day private universities can be traced back to this history. A brief review of the historical development of Cambodia's education sector will therefore provide context for the upcoming analysis. This review will focus on three themes: 1) the development of Cambodian higher education, 2) the rise of
English in Cambodian higher education, and 3) the growth of private universities, as these three themes are closely connected with many current challenges.

The modernisation of Cambodia’s education system began with independence in 1953 when then Prince Sihanouk began making major investments in education for the first time (Eilenberg, 1961; Sideth, 2004). The country’s first university, the University of Phnom Penh, was created at this time (Duggan, 1996: 363-4), and by the end of the 1960s, several provincial capitals also boasted their own universities (Duggan, 1996: 363-4), though doubts remain as to the overall effectiveness of this system (Clayton, 1998: 6). The policy agenda for education did not change substantially under Prince Sihanouk’s successor, Lon Nol, despite hardships related to the conflict in neighbouring Vietnam, and by the Khmer Rouge takeover in 1975, the country had a total of nine institutes of higher learning (Clayton, 1999: 5-6).

With the rise of Democratic Kampuchea, Pol Pot’s radical Maoist regime widely known as the Khmer Rouge, Cambodia’s education system was razed to the ground. From 1975 to 1979, the Khmer Rouge aimed to stamp out all foreign, and especially Western, influence on the country (Clayton, 1998: 5). This spelled disaster for the education system. Both formal and informal education were abolished, with the exception of state-controlled political indoctrination, and not only the old system’s educators, but also its students, were systematically persecuted. Various statistics tell a grim story of the effects of the Khmer Rouge on educated Cambodians. The capital’s largest and oldest centre for higher learning, the University of Phnom Penh, is said to have lost all but eighty-seven
of its more than one thousand academics and intellectuals (Clayton, 1998: 8). The destruction of human capacity was matched by the destruction of educational infrastructure as the country’s schools and libraries were either put to other uses or completely demolished.

The Khmer Rouge were finally overthrown by a Vietnamese invasion in 1979, and the education system began to grow once more, but progress was hampered by the West and China's opposition to expanding Soviet influence in the region (Clayton, 1999: 71). The Vietnamese-backed government in Cambodia, the People's Republic of Kampuchea (P.R.K.), initiated their own reconstruction of the education system in order to advance their political ideology (Ayres, 2000a: 452). The main thrust of Vietnam’s efforts was directed at training primary and secondary teachers in the capital, which resulted in large numbers of graduates, but improvement was scant in the countryside and the quality training graduates received was questionable (Duggan, 1996: 367-8). At the university level, Vietnam and other Eastern bloc countries sent their own instructors to Cambodia, helped train local staff, and provided scholarships to Soviet-aligned countries (Clayton, 1999: 71-3). The quality of instruction, however, was once more hampered by a curriculum geared toward propagating a Marxist-Leninist philosophy in order to establish a communist ally next door (Clayton, 1999: 71), and further problems were caused by the P.R.K.’s limiting the number of spots available at universities, leading to deep corruption.

The Vietnamese finally withdrew from Cambodia in 1989 under intense international pressure. Due to political and economic forces in Vietnam and the
Soviet Union, the Cambodian education system at this time was still in a dire state. Yet, the Vietnamese departure ushered in a new era of international involvement, led by Western capitalist democracies such as the United States and Australia, and their ideologically aligned organisations such as the World Bank and Asian Development Bank (Sloper, 1999; Ayres, 200b). These Western powers were all funding major programs by the mid-1990s, but the situation in higher education was still challenging. Many of the same problems that had frustrated the Vietnamese remained. Very few educated people were left in the country, and those educated under the Vietnamese were too few in number and not yet able to effectively manage the higher education system.

Many of the challenges in higher education can be traced to the difficulties of reconstruction in the decades following the Vietnamese withdrawal. When aid began flowing into Cambodia, the lion’s share of funding went to basic education because most donors believed that investments in basic education yield greater socioeconomic benefits (Duggan, 1997: 2-3) The specific target for most of this aid was teacher training and retraining, but the efficacy of this aid has often been questioned (Duggan, 1996: 373). There is no doubt that recent years have witnessed major progress, but the government has still fallen short of all previously established targets for improvement (Tan, 2007). Countless reports have documented the abiding problems in basic education, including systemic corruption⁷, high repetition and drop out rates, and, in general, poor quality instruction and facilities (Duggan, 1996: 368). Even the most recent reports stress that all the same problems remain (Foresberg & Ratcliffe, 2003: 1; MoEYS
The current crop of Cambodian university students was therefore one of the first to emerge from a post-occupation basic education system struggling to regain its feet with the support of international donors.

The revitalisation of Western influence in Cambodia also led to a change in language policy in education. Under the Khmer Rouge, speakers of foreign languages had been persecuted to purge the country of “imperialist” influence. The Vietnamese had made their own moves to block the spread of languages such as English and French to limit Cambodia’s ability to engage in dialogue with the capitalist bloc and encouraged the study of Vietnamese and Russian to facilitate Cambodia’s integration into the U.S.S.R.’s political and economic system (Clayton, 2002: 5). With the arrival of Western powers, English began making deep inroads into the country. The high school language requirements were almost immediately changed from Vietnamese and Russian to English and French (Clayton, 2002: 7). The ensuing political changes also provided strong motivation for Cambodians to learn English. The country was largely dependent on bilateral agreements with Western counties and international donor organisations, and in the post-UNTAC era, it would take the first steps toward entering regional alliances such as ASEAN (Clayton, 2002: 5-6). These countries and organisations all use English as an official language, so the Cambodian government, the international organisations, and Cambodian individuals all had a major interest in English.

Despite wrangling by the French, English soon won pre-eminent status in Cambodia’s higher education sector. The use of foreign languages was driven by
student demand (Clayton, 2002: 3-4) but also by the lack of instructional material and qualified instructors in the local language. Using these foreign languages for higher education was no small feat in a country where speakers of all foreign languages had been wiped out ten years earlier, where the few remaining intellectuals had grown up under the French system, and where language instruction for the preceding decade had been in Soviet-aligned languages. Donors could not get the proficiency of students up to a reasonable standard without making sacrifices to investments in curriculum and staff development, university management and planning, and student administration (Duggan, 1997: 11).

What was, perhaps, the decisive factor in establishing English as a medium of instruction in higher education was the explosion of private universities starting around the turn of the millennium. The lack of spaces in the public sector, combined with students' willingness to shoulder the cost of their education through “informal fees,” represented an opportunity for Cambodian entrepreneurs (Duggan, 1997: 12). Without well-defined accreditation procedures, universities began popping up all over the capital. The first one was created in 1997, and there were one or two more in each of the following years, until a sudden surge in 2002 resulted in the creation of twelve more private universities (Ford, 2003). The government finally passed legislation on accreditation in 2003, but powerful vested interests in combination with the strongly autocratic style of leadership in the country have blunted its effects (Ford, 2003), and the number of private universities continues to grow at a rapid
pace. There were 13 public and 31 private higher education institutions recognised in Cambodia in 2004-2005 (MoEYS 2005, 7), and the government predicts that 60 percent of Cambodia's 90,000 university students will attend private institutions by 2010 (MoEYS 2006-10, 12).

Many of the largest private universities in Cambodia use English as the medium of instruction. With the weakness of basic education in the country, the lack of regulation in the private higher education sector, and uneven opportunities for private language training, the use of English contributes to many of the challenges in Cambodian university classrooms. In public school, students are currently supposed to study either English or French for two to five hours per week from grades five to twelve depending on the availability of resources (MoEYS 2005-2009, 7). In practice, students often spend as little as an hour per week studying English. By the time a student reaches university, assuming he or she has only learned English through the public school system, there is no reasonable way that he or she can be expected to cope with the demands of higher education in English. Even when students have been able to afford a private education in English, they have typically done so in general English programs, rather than academically oriented programs, meaning that they have little experience of academic language or conventions of writing. These difficulties are exacerbated by practices at private universities such as extremely lax language proficiency requirements. With generally inadequate language testing, and only token preparation courses for students, expatriate instructors at private universities often face the absurd situation of teaching students with pre-
intermediate level English from three hundred page English textbooks. The result of this system is often that Cambodian students graduate with neither English proficiency nor any real understanding of subject content.

**RESEARCH CONTEXT**

The present research takes as its focus a well-established private university located in a major city in Cambodia. With several thousand students and hundreds of full- and part-time staff, it was one of the largest universities of its kind in the country. The community in which it was located lacked many of the social or cultural venues frequently accompanying universities; only the larger than usual number of breakfast cafes, copy shops, and Internet cafes in the area signalled the university’s presence. The university was located in a low-rise office building, and like most other private universities in Cambodia, it consisted of classrooms for students and offices for staff, with no dormitories or sports facilities, and only a small library and a few public computers. Classrooms were spartan, with air-conditioning generally reserved for only a few classes, and long rows of desks that provided seating for approximately seventy students. The school’s focus was provision of undergraduate classes in the social sciences and humanities, so many of the normal university functions such as research did not take place, which is not untypical of universities in many Southeast Asian countries (Lee, 2007: 550).

Classes at the university contained a fairly even balance of male and female students. Most students were in their early twenties, but a number of
mature students attended evening sessions. The university was expensive by local standards, but a number of students came from more modest backgrounds, some coming from the provinces, a few working in their spare time. Many students, because classes were always grouped into morning, afternoon, or evening sessions, also studied in other programs elsewhere at the same time. There were no student governance bodies, no associations for cultural or religious groups, and no competitive sports teams. The lack of housing facilities on campus meant that students continued to live with relatives, and there did not seem to be the same sense of community that I had known as a student at one of Canada’s largest universities in Toronto. The only gathering places on campus were the canteen and the benches in the main lobby. However, all of my students had already completed two years of study in the Bachelor of English Communication program where they all attended the same courses in cohorts and so had the opportunity to develop close personal relationships.

The timeframe for the research is mid-2005, when I worked as an instructor of literature at the university. A recent graduate in English literature, I was in my mid-twenties at the time and had previously worked for one year as a language teacher in a foundation program at another private university. Like many of my colleagues, I was a native English speaker, Caucasian, of middle-class background, with a basic command of the local language, Khmer. Unlike most of them, however, I was only a few years older than many of my students. My prior work experiences had given me some insight into education in the country, and I was looking forward to this new position, but my basic values fit the
mould of many of my expatriate colleagues. I expected students to be self-motivated, take responsibility for their own learning, manage their time effectively, and participate actively in class.

**METHODOLOGY**

*Narrative Inquiry*

This paper is a narrative inquiry into the experiences of one expatriate instructor at a private university in a large city in Cambodia. The narrative inquiry approach used here is based the approach developed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and is similar to the one used in related studies on, for example, culture and curriculum decisions (Boone & Chan, 2005), Asian international students’ identity formation (Hsieh, 2006), experiences of Asian international students in higher education (Hsieh, 2007), an expatriate instructor’s practice in Thai higher education (Ferguson, 2008), instructors’ experiences working with ethnic minority students in primary schools (Orr, et. al., 2007), identity formation of Asian international educators (Kooy & de Freitas, 2007), and novice teachers’ development of culturally responsive pedagogy in Hispanic classrooms (Bergeron, 2008).

A large number of field texts consisting of reflective narratives related to the experience of developing a culturally responsive pedagogy were composed. The majority of these narratives were retrospective in nature, though a number of artefacts, including photographs, lesson plans, and journals were used as an
“archaeology of memory and meaning” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 114-5). The creation of field texts was guided by Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) notion of a metaphorical “three-dimensional narrative inquiry space” based on John Dewey’s (1938) three axes of experience: continuity, situation, and interaction. Thinking in terms of this metaphor helped in attending to the complexity of experience. For Clandinin and Connelly, the dimension of continuity is temporal, requiring the researcher to think of specific incidents, the past events that shaped them, and the inquiry’s future uses (2000: 50); the dimension of situation is related to space, requiring the researcher to think about the physical site of the inquiry (2000: 51); and the dimension of interaction is personal and social, requiring the researcher to think of his or her own thoughts, feelings, and hopes, as well as his or her relations with other people (2000: 50).

Following this framework, I composed narratives related to the temporal dimension by considering the historical influences on Cambodia’s educational system, my prior experiences as a student and instructor, and the potential personal and social impact of the research; the spatial dimension by considering the classrooms, campus, city, and country as a whole; and the personal-social dimension by considering interactions with students, colleagues, and administrators both inside and outside the classroom in order to recognise the relation between individuals, the institution, and the wider community as well as how these interactions shaped my perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. Throughout this process, close attention was paid to the actual process of doing
narrative inquiry, enabling reflexivity in “puzzling out” the complexities of composing field texts and research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 103-4).

The move from field text to research text involves “many hours [of] reading and rereading field texts in order to construct a chronicled or summarized account of what is contained within different sets of field texts” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 131). An initial analysis identified “matters such as character, place, scene, plot, tension, end point, narrator, context, and tone” within field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 131). Subsequent “narrative coding” involved holding various field texts in relation to each other in a process of “relentless rereading” to identify “patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes” while constantly posing questions related to “meaning and significance” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 131-3). Throughout this process, close attention was paid to the interrelatedness of the three dimensions of narrative inquiry, such as how social interactions (i.e. the personal-social dimension) evolved over time (i.e. the temporal dimension) and how the physical environment of the university constituted within recent historical events in Cambodia (i.e. the spatial dimension) impacted social interactions in the classroom (i.e. the personal-social dimension).

Throughout the data collection and analysis, I surveyed literature related to intercultural education in order to enhance my analysis. Consistent with the use of secondary literature in many narrative inquiries, I regarded the use of secondary literature as “a kind of conversation between theory and life or, at least, between theory and the stories of life contained in the inquiry” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 41). Therefore, literature was not only read prior to the
commencement of the inquiry, in order to identify gaps in the literature or trace theoretical issues, but also during the process of creating and reviewing field texts and writing the research text. Conducting these readings during the process of data collection and analysis allowed me to re-examine the themes emerging from my field texts in an ongoing dialectical process.

The results are organized according to common plotlines identified in the literature. Part of the objective of organising the analysis this way is to investigate the import of these issues in light of the lived experience of an actual practitioner. The various sections are, however, united by common themes that were identified in the field texts. For each section, I attempt to present specific examples of classroom interactions; identify some of the cultural norms and values that may have influenced these classroom interactions; describe strategies of adaptation in response to these classroom interactions; locate my experiences within ongoing debates in the intercultural education literature; and identify emergent themes in my narratives of experience. In the concluding section, I consider the broader implications of case studies such as the present one for international higher education, particularly in the context of Cambodia.

**Narrative Research and Intercultural Communication**

The narratives that resulted from exploring my experience developing a culturally responsive pedagogy emphasised conflicts that ostensibly resulted from culturally divergent values and practices in education. While analysing and interpreting these narratives in the process of moving from field texts to research
text, intercultural communication theory was utilised as a heuristic device to unearth meaning in the narratives and to explore the cultural bases of cultural conflict and compromise in the classroom.

Theories of intercultural communication such as Hofstede’s have several limitations that are compensated for by narrative research methods. First, cultural dimensions provide only general descriptions of the values of national populations, while people in concrete situations simultaneously belong to multiple cultural units that include region, organisation, generation, gender, class, and even occupation (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005: 10-11, 284-5). Second, there is a danger in using culture as the sole category to explain behaviour. Factors such as personality traits, personal values, self-construal, open-mindedness, tendencies toward egalitarianism, and gender have all been implicated in mediating cultural influence (Gudykunst, 1997; Poortinga & Van Hemert, 2001; Matsumoto & Yoo, 2006: 240; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005: 4-5; 92-4). Third, while Hofstede’s dimensions afford broad predictions of cultural similarity and difference, each dimension is manifested in a unique way within each culture, meaning locating a country’s position relative to other countries on the scale of cultural values does not permit one to pinpoint all the behaviours in which that orientation will result (Gudykunst, 1997: 335). Finally, certain culture-specific behaviours that are often crucial to successful intercultural relations such as taking off one’s shoes before entering a house or abstaining from touching people on the head cannot be accounted for either in terms of Hall’s behavioural categories or Hofstede’s value dimensions (Singelis & Brown, 1995: 356).
What emerges from these criticisms is the realisation that the discrete abstractions of intercultural communication theory are insufficient to explain the complex interplay of various personal, social, and cultural factors in concrete situations. While it is easy to attribute specific behaviours to national-level abstractions, such as linking cheating with Collectivism, this leads to stereotypes that can cut off reflection by giving instructors an easy place to lay blame for behaviours that come into conflict with their own culturally grounded values. Using narrative inquiry for intercultural research is one way of overcoming these limitations because narrative emphasises the processes of interpretation and understanding as it unfolds in specific social and cultural contexts where “complex and dynamic interrelationships of cultures, institutions, history, and processes of social adaptation” prevail (Soin & Scheytt, 2006: 66-7). What results from the dialectical relationship between these narratives and their interpretation through the lens of intercultural communication theory is therefore a text that does not presume to present an authoritative or objective account of what culturally responsive pedagogy “is” or “should be.” Rather, it is an example of a “writerly” text, in Barthes’ (1985) sense disrupting assumptions and catalysing interpretative activity, that could be characterised as “intercultural hermeneutics” (Lillhannus, 2002).

**Evaluative Criteria and Methodological Constraints**

The criteria of validity, reliability, and generalisability used to assess traditional positivistic research differ from those used to assess narrative
inquiries. Narratives are representations of experiences of the world and therefore involve selectivity and foregrounding of specific aspects of experience, making narrative inquiries tentative, partial, and suggestive (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 93) rather than objective, authoritative, or final. The specific criteria by which narrative inquiries can be judged are still under development. Some of the possibilities have been reviewed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000: 184-5), while other critics have devised their own guidelines to assess autobiographical, self-study, and narrative research (e.g. Bruner, 1991; Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Feldman, 2003; Heikkinen et al., 2007).

Criteria such as plausibility, authenticity, transferability, and resonance are especially appealing with regard to narrative inquiries. When reading personal narratives, we gauge their plausibility according to how well they match our own experiences; the more plausible narratives will have greater resonance; and on the basis of this resonance we can transfer what we have learned from the narratives to our own practice. Achieving these qualities, many critics insist, involves resisting the temptation to “smooth” the narrative so as to create a story in which everything works out in the end (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 181). For Clandinin and Connelly, narrative researchers resist this impulse by “slipping to cool observation” and “slipping into detail” (81-3). This means facing up to anxieties, doubts, mistakes, conflicts, and contradictions in the research.

The use of this methodology entails several constraints. The most significant limitation is arguably related to the study’s personal approach, which focuses exclusively on the experiences of the practitioner, neglecting the voices
of students and colleagues. This criticism is taken up by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), who recommend using “response communities,” or groups of people who are familiar with the situation to read the research texts, allowing us to see other perspectives (73). However, the weakness of the first-person approach can also be regarded as a strength. By infusing narratives with the author’s own values, norms, and beliefs, this first-person approach creates a channel by which readers can reach into the narrator’s inner world, thereby producing a source of data different from that gathered on the basis of the positivistic methodologies, and allows members of the cultures studied to reveal new meanings that may have been missed by the researcher (Soin & Scheytt, 2006: 65).

Another limitation is that the present research is focussed on a specific learning environment. Although case study research cannot reliably be generalised to wider populations, case studies can often be used to generalise back to theory as well as to test the validity of previously established theories in new contexts. The narratives presented here demonstrate the usefulness of concepts in intercultural communication theory for interpreting specific intercultural contact situations (Soin & Scheytt, 2006: 67). However, the primary motivation for narrative inquiries is not to yield “a set of knowledge claims that might incrementally add to knowledge in the field,” but “for the vicarious testing of life possibilities” that they permit and the “sense of meaning and significance with respect to the research topic” that they create (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 42).
RESULTS: PLOTLINES IN INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION

Paradoxical Subject Positions

The International Herald Tribune held up before me, I sat with my back straight, head tilted at a slight angle, sleeves buttoned and tie carefully straightened. The assistant snapped another photo as I pretended to read intently. Did the photos look all right? He showed them to me on the camera’s digital display screen. I looked stiff, unnatural, posed. Was this what they wanted? It was the first time I had ever seen a copy of this particular newspaper in Cambodia. Where had they managed to find it? Presumably, the photo was for some banner or brochure. Where else would someone take my photo for this reason? I felt like laughing. Why had they asked me to pose for them? I couldn’t help but feel cynical. What were the semiotic implications of these images they were creating?

Before considering a range of plotlines in intercultural education loosely grouped around classroom interactions and pedagogical adaptations, I would like to reflect upon the theme of identity. Drawing on postcolonial theory and discourse theory, Fergusson (2008) notes, “A westerner in an [Asian] school is a symbol before he or she is a teacher” (105). As long as identity is conceived of narratively, as arising from the stories that we tell ourselves, the basis of our identities will be at least partly out of our own control (Smith & Sparkes, 2008:
Just as teachers have stereotypes about Asian students, Asian students have stereotypes about Western teachers, and these shape the way Western teachers come to see themselves. What comes first – the category of Westerner or the category of teacher – is irrelevant. The important thing is that the symbolic associations, or discourses, that shape the culture’s view of the role of Westerners, and teachers, and Western teachers is central to attempts to understand the identity of the expatriate instructor in intercultural learning environments. One of the common themes in discussions of identity in intercultural education is the sense of occupying a paradoxical subject position as both a privileged educational authority and a disempowered outsider to the dominant culture. This paradox is often at the heart of discussions of student resistance to Western instructors and their teaching methods (e.g. Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Crabtree & Sapp, 2004; Garson, 2005; MacLennan, 2002; Singh & Doherty, 2004). Here I would like to explore and expand upon this theme of paradoxical subject positions in relation to the categories of Westerner, teacher, and Western teacher.

One of the common themes in my narratives related to my attempt to understand my place in the culture and thereby my place in relation to my students. The influence of postcolonial theory has brought to light the powerful symbolic associations Westerners possess in many parts of the world. Cambodia is a former colony, a victim of the war between Vietnam and the United States, and a country reconstructed by Western powers following its autogenocide. The mixture of discourses arising from this history is not lost on Western teachers
such as Fergusson (2008). He writes, “The white westerner embodies a symbolic position of power, influence, and privileged knowledge in countries considered by the West as ‘Third World’ or underdeveloped” (105). As a Westerner in Thailand, he notes that he was seen as a representative of an economically powerful country, an authority on the English language, and a spokesperson for internationalisation (Fergusson, 2008: 113). These discourses place Westerners in symbolic positions of power, but competing discourses also place Westerners in the position of neocolonial oppressors. As Fergusson notes, the process of globalisation has led many people to seek to follow Western lifestyles, but it has also made many people anxious about the effect such lifestyles will have on time-honoured customs and traditions (106). For much of the world, globalisation is seen as Westernisation and, therefore, as a threat to local cultures (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005: 237-8). This paradox also forms the core of criticisms of internationalization as a neocolonial enterprise (Giroux, 2005: 49-52) and at the same time as an empowerment of students through gaining valuable cultural capital (Cook & Amatucci, 2006).

A second category that is often invoked in discussions of identity is that of the teacher. It is a commonplace that teachers occupy positions of respect in many (especially high Power Distance) cultures. This was noted, for example, by Fergusson in Thailand (2008: 99). Much the same is true of the traditional role of teachers in Cambodian society, and I witnessed many public displays of deference, such as students lowering their heads as we passed each other on the stairs, or offering me papers with two hands, or bowing to me with hands
pressed together in a traditional gesture of respect. My narratives differed from others in their ambivalence toward these gestures. Often they seemed little more than roleplay, formal shows of deference required by the situation, rather than genuine displays of respect. One of the things that seems missing from discussions of the traditional role of teachers in different societies is the multiple way in which present circumstances compromise these traditional roles. While the concept of the teacher might be invested with authority that commands reverence, actual teachers are often more contradictory figures, and I wondered how the difficulty in recruiting and training teachers over the past two decades combined with corrupt practices such as accepting bribes on exam day had impacted, if at all, the traditional symbolic figure of the teacher in Cambodia.

Finally, what is often lost in discussions of teacher identity is that Western instructors occupy a separate category that is often different from that of Westerners or teachers as such. Coming to an understanding of what a Western instructor signifies in the Cambodian context is not simple. What I found in my narratives of being a Western instructor in an intercultural environment that differs from many others was a sense that the Western instructor can be sought after primarily for accompanying positive symbolic associations, while simultaneously being regarded with scepticism or even suspicion. The university gave me a higher salary than my local colleagues and exempted me from many of their administrative responsibilities. Was this an example of Western privilege? Too often it seemed like a token white face was an unfortunate necessity for marketing purposes. The simple fact that a token white face was required attests
to the continuing power of the signifier, white=westerner=privilege, in this part of
the world. Yet, this is a signifier that can be cynically deployed for commercial
ends by those who are equally aware of discourses that place the Western
teacher in a relatively low social position. The teacher is one of the lowest rungs
on the expatriate hierarchy, as teachers earn significantly less than many other
expatriates, and it is often a default position for those who cannot find other forms
of employment. The recognition that the Western teacher can signify these two
things at the same time is one point that is often overlooked by those who equate
empowerment with the Westerner’s symbolic associations in the developing
world and ignore the disempowerment associated with the absence of in-group
membership.

All of the cultural conflicts and pedagogical adaptations described in the
successive sections of this paper were enacted in one specific learning
environment within the context of these paradoxical subject positions. The
experience of being an empowered authority as I received gestures of deference
from students and was privileged by the institution, went hand-in-hand with the
experience of being a disempowered outsider as I struggled to implement
changes to classroom practices, such as combating plagiarism, curbing
collaboration on tests intended to measure individual learning, or encouraging
active participation in classroom discussions. At the same time, though it is
problematic to speak for the students, I suspect that they occupied a similarly
paradoxical position, as they were faced with an outsider to their Collectivistic
culture, but one who occupied a position of power in the traditional hierarchies of
their society by virtue of my occupation. The paradox was enacted as students were asked to adapt to my own expectations regarding education, which arose from cultural values different from their own, while retaining the power to collectively resist these changes, all within the context of studying in a foreign language at a university that was ostensibly promoting internationalisation through the use of foreign literary texts and hiring of expatriate instructors. It would be naive to assume that classroom conflicts arising from different cultural values can be resolved into perfect harmony, and that the balance of power is not an issue in conflict, negotiation, and compromise, but it is important to remember that, due to the paradoxical subject positions created in and through the discourses related to teachers, Westerners, and Western teachers, that the relations of power are not completely asymmetrical, but shifting and dynamic, and that binaries implied by terms such as “oppressor” or “coloniser” oversimplify a complex relationship.

**Cultural Adaptation in the Classroom**

*We were discussing details of the next writing assignment. Returning to the issue of plagiarism was inevitable. I could threaten them, but I knew that threats would be met with scepticism, and I wanted them to understand why this mattered to me so much. Did they know the kinds of penalties they would face for plagiarism if they ever went abroad? Did they know they could easily fail an entire course? Did they know they might even be expelled from a university? Some of them seemed*
shocked, but I wondered what difference it would really make.

Whatever I said to them, they could always reply, “But this is Cambodia.”

E.T. Hall notes that the natural reaction when faced with cultural difference is a destructive impulse to force the other into conformity with one's culturally-mediated expectations. He continues, "The cost of controlling one's inputs by destroying others eventually gets too high to maintain, although there may be (and often is) little awareness of the fact that the cost is too great, because of a preoccupation with the job of trying to maintain control in an unpredictable situation" (Hall, 1989; 49). This impulse is evident in the foreign classroom, too, as evidenced by Bodycott and Walker's introductory story of the feeling that students should adapt to their instructors (2000: 79). My initial reaction to the seeming mismatch between my own and the students' expectations was therefore not untypical of all expatriate instructors. The desire to force my students to change in order to satisfy my ideals led to frustration, annoyance, and disappointment. What became increasingly clear was that I was also expected to adapt to their culture. This is not a role reversal that some teachers are willing to accept, and the ensuing conflict is one that is often characterised by the same negative emotions that I experienced.

The obvious alternative to forcing change on students was to change my own practice. This is an approach that other authors have advocated (e.g. Crabtree & Sapp, 2004: 121), but it comes with its own problems. First, this
approach assumes that students actually want foreign instructors to behave like local instructors. Student expectations can often seem contradictory in intercultural learning environments. Students may react negatively to many foreign instructional practices, but they may still have a desire for foreign instructors. Second, to adapt to student expectations the instructor must understand exactly what it is that the students expect. Arriving at such an understanding is never simple or straightforward (Egege & Kutieleh, 2004: 76). Third, some of the practices that students expect may run counter to the instructor’s own values. Thus, developing a culturally responsive pedagogy does not mean simply emulating local norms related to instructional practices, but negotiating mutually acceptable changes to the way classes are conducted. This compromise also affirms the development of intercultural competence, which is one of the implicit or explicit goals of internationalisation (Gacel-Ávila, 2005: 125).

To affect these necessary compromises therefore required me to initiate compromise on the part of my students. The same process of reflexivity that drives change in instructors is almost certainly, even without instructors’ conscious involvement, going on among students themselves to varying degrees. However, discovering ways to facilitate compromise is another way of increasing the chances for successful collaboration in intercultural learning environments. While Western universities have sophisticated programs designed to help international students adapt to new educational cultures, there seem to be few suggestions for instructors in monocultural overseas classrooms to encourage change on the part of students. One strategy is to make the instructor’s own
culture shock, acculturation, and expectations part of classroom discussion (Crabtree & Sapp, 2004: 122), or to arm students with explicit information as to the cultural underpinnings of Western educational values and practices so that they are empowered to operate effectively within this cultural context (Egege & Kutieleh, 2004: 81).

Classroom discussions of cultural differences seem to occur naturally as instructors talk about their own educational experiences, what they expect of the students, and how they feel due to specific classroom interactions. One problem with discussing reactions with students, however, is that without understanding a culture from the inside and in its entirety, culturally conditioned behaviours can seem childish (Hall, 1989: 63). One of the pitfalls of talking about cultural differences in the classroom is trivialising the nature and extent of cultural difference, such as attributing student reticence to “shyness” or dismissing face-saving behaviours as “immature.” Also, focussing on differences tends to exaggerate differences, leads to identifying differences as significant when they may be irrelevant, and creates hypersensitivity to differences that can result in an actual deepening of the cultural divide (Egege & Kutieleh, 2004: 76). Thus, it is important to be respectful of culturally conditioned behaviours as well as to attend to common ground in addition to differences.

Another problem with discussing experiences and expectations with students is that direct verbal communication cannot be assumed to be the simplest means of learning about student expectations, a point underscored by E.T. Hall’s (1990b: 101; 1989; 91) concept of high-context communication (i.e.
communication that is inexplicit but understood because the majority of the meaning is contained in the context rather than the message). More important than talking to students about how I felt about certain classroom interactions, therefore, was learning to listen without passing judgement, foster a relationship conducive to more open sharing of experiences and expectations, and attend to more subtle (even non-verbal) messages in order to better understand the possible origins of classroom conflicts.

After trying to initiate compromise on the part of my students, the second necessary move was to find ways of adapting myself to the situation in order to satisfy my students as well as uphold my values. This move forms the core of the growing literature on intercultural learning environments describing specific pedagogic adaptations (e.g. Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999; Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Crabtree & Sapp, 2004; Garson, 2005; MacLennan, 2000; Viranten et al., 2006). Experimenting with new ways of reaching specific pedagogic objectives required me to shift my expectations of student roles and how learning could be demonstrated. Shifting my expectations, however, allowed me to make significant changes to the way classes were conducted, assignments designed, and outcomes measured. The goal of these changes was to accommodate the particular cultural expectations and linguistic requirements of the students as well as to curb what were perceived to be negative learning patterns, such as surface learning, passivity, plagiarism, and cheating, which will be taken up in subsequent sections.
One final note is that a precondition for successful adaptation is a desire to understand, relate to, and appreciate the wider experience of the students (Mathison, 2003). This means learning about students' lives, interacting with colleagues, and trying to participate as a member of the community, insofar as this is possible given the varying degrees to which other cultures accept outsiders. While people can achieve “task-related biculturality” (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005: 342) by learning to work effectively within certain situational frames such as the university, by remaining always an expatriate, always separated from the host culture by that distinction, always refusing to take part in the wider life of the community, it is impossible to come to a deep appreciation of the culture. Thus, becoming an effective intercultural educator requires not only pedagogical adjustments, but also openness to the culture as a whole by taking part in the community.

By the end, I had learned much from listening to my students talk about their educational experiences and expectations, as well as from colleagues and other members of the culture, and by observing their reactions to my classroom practices and their own group interactions. I also believe that my students came to a better understanding of my experiences and expectations and the reasons why I wanted them to behave in certain ways in the classroom. However, I also found that understanding does not always translate into action, and even being able to talk about differences is not tantamount to willingness to change in response to those differences, and so it was beholden upon me, for the sake of successful collaboration, to make changes to the way I conducted classes and
measured outcomes, and change on their side tended to be, for some voluntary, but for many others, who were perhaps less motivated, still unwilling, perhaps indicating the difficulty of cultural adaptation, especially within quite limited timeframes.

**Texts and Contexts**

As I picked up the textbook, a photocopied reader with three Shakespearean tragedies, one of the senior women in the office, a Filipina Ph.D., offered me some advice. She was telling me how students here would find it hard to relate to these old stories when I suddenly stopped nodding politely and blurted out, “But these are quintessentially Cambodian stories! Two young people who fall in love, parents who bar the way to happiness, marriages arranged against their will. That happens here all the time.” She was dumbstruck. Then I added with self-conscious irony born of years of reading criticisms of canonicity, “See, Shakespeare is universal!”

One of the major issues in discussions of culturally responsive pedagogy is the selection of appropriate resources and approaches to these resources (e.g. Boone & Chan, 2005; Cook & Amatucci, 2006). Many scholars focus on the selection of texts from a wide array of sources to accommodate students of different backgrounds, efforts to make connections between diverse texts and students' lives, and strategies to promote students' voices in interpreting texts.
What is missing in many of these discussions is the realisation that culturally responsive pedagogy involves much more than choosing authors from other cultures for study or establishing connections between these texts and the students’ experiences. Rather, it also involves thinking about how to approach texts given an understanding of the context of the students’ own personal lives: how they study, what they study, how they spend their time outside the classroom, and how they view their responsibilities as students. When my classes did not meet my expectations, instead receiving the text passively, I began thinking about these issues within a Cambodian context.

One of the barriers to student engagement with texts in my classroom was not that the story was too “foreign” to them, but that most students had simply not read the text prior to class. The reading load per se was not the problem, as it was a matter of a few pages every two or three days, but the structure of the students’ own lives. They complained about not having time, citing their jobs and other studies, and I learned that many of them worked full-time or part-time, studied a second bachelor degree, took private classes in languages or computers, or a combination of all of the above. Many of them had little time to devote to study, and for those who did, many shared the view that study meant attending class rather than spending time reading and writing outside of class. This was not something I was likely to change, especially without the support of the school, which had institutionalised the expectation that students could arrive to class without reading the text and have it “explained” to them.
My first reaction was to forge ahead, with the assumption that students should take responsibility for (not) not completing assigned readings. The problem was that very few students finished the assigned readings, and the university expected instructors to accommodate these learners, and I quickly found myself on the verge of another conflict. In the end, I had to take a pragmatic approach, to compromise on an issue that I regarded as secondary, and provide time for students to read at the start of class, either individually, as groups, or as a whole class by beginning most sessions with a collaborative reading activity to encourage a closer look at the text by those who were already familiar with it, allow time for a first reading for the others, and form the basis for further discussion in the remainder of the session. This tactic also provided opportunities to practice specific reading skills and increased the amount of English communication through student collaboration, though it seemed unfair to the motivated students who would otherwise have completed the reading on their own.

Once students were familiar with the texts, my chief concern was encouraging them to draw on their personal experience and offer their own opinions. Many authors have argued that culturally responsive pedagogy involves supporting students’ attempts to “connect new knowledge to their own experiences” (Bergeron, 2008: 6) and that students participate more in the learning process when their cultures are welcomed into the classroom (Bergeron, 2008: 7). Given that curricular decisions are often centralised, such as the choice to assign Shakespeare in my own literature class, the power of instructors to be
inclusive with regard to students’ experiences is constrained. However, many have argued that a key element of culturally responsive pedagogy is not only the selection of texts from diverse sources but also the connection of texts with students own experiences, though some still regard “the apparently decolonizing maneuver of such an anti-Orientalist endeavor to redeem Shakespeare through non-Western traditions [as] a recolonizing exercise” (Bharucha, 2004: 3).

Given that I was not from the same culture as my students, making these connections was not always easy, though my own experience in the country gave me confidence that these stories were relevant to the lives of my students. Establishing a connection between the stories and the students’ experiences depended on knowing what experiences students had in common, or at least discourses with which they were familiar, and how to approach the text from some of these perspectives. For example, I knew that the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* was relevant to many students whose parents played a large role in selecting their future husbands and wives and had many parallels in Cambodian popular culture such as films and music videos.

The urge to go beyond this starting point to the real work of seeing how students could interpret these texts and relate them to their own experience led me to focus on the text itself, on its internal mechanics, in order to develop the capacity for critical analysis and interpretation based on textual evidence. This approach deemphasised the functionally “useless” knowledge of Shakespeare in favour of the cognitive skills of close reading, analysis, interpretation, and logical argumentation. It combined the promotion of higher-order thinking skills with the
sanctioning of student culture as an authorised form of knowledge in the classroom. This brand of reader response (Knapp, 2004; Mailloux, 1979) has been advocated by others for literature classes in intercultural learning environments (Cook & Amatucci, 2006). My hope was that when students realised that these foreign stories were relevant to their lived experience, they would become more comfortable drawing on their own collective cultural resources to create unique readings supported by textual evidence (Ghosh, 2005).

Opening up to students’ collective cultural resources brought to my attention for the first time the story of *Tum Teav*, a traditional Cambodian folktale, which had striking parallels to the plot of *Romeo and Juliet*. Yet, despite moments such as these giving me confidence that these canonical Western texts were relevant to the lives of Cambodian students, this method of privileging reader response did not always seem culturally appropriate. While virtually all authors on culturally responsive pedagogy advocate the creation of an inclusive space for students to share their own experiences, this ignores the implications of Uncertainty Avoidance, or the sense that “what is different is dangerous” (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005: 165), and Power Distance, or the acceptance as natural of status hierarchies (Hofstede & Hofstede, 205: 45) for preferred instructional styles.

Encouraging students to bring their own experiences to bear on texts leads to a decentring of the teaching process in which the instructor is put in the role of learner as students articulate new ways of connecting the texts to their
cultures and students are put in the role of teachers by contributing examples and parallels from their own culture to enrich the entire class’ understanding of texts. This style of role reversal may be fashionable in the theoretical paradigms to which many authors on culturally responsive pedagogy pay allegiance, but it is not always greeted with enthusiasm by students from educational cultures that are accustomed to more didactic pedagogies based on high Power Distance and the associated deference to the instructor’s ability to explicate texts and high Uncertainty Avoidance and the associated unwillingness to venture personal readings of texts.

**Language and Culture**

*When we reached the end of Romeo and Juliet, many students complained about the play’s conclusion and felt that the story would have been better had the young lovers survived. An assignment asking students to think about the thematic implications of changing the play’s conclusion would allow students to bring their own culture, their own discourses related to love, marriage, loyalty, and family to bear on the text. To justify opinions on a thematic level, students would minimally require a few simple structures such as third conditionals and past models which are generally introduced at an intermediate level of proficiency. Without teaching this language, I knew most students would struggle to produce comprehensible responses, but it was impossible to justify using time teaching the*
structures and providing opportunities for controlled practice and doubtful this would improve either the content or organisation of responses. I also doubted they would receive this input gratefully. But what they would do without the language to answer the question?

The relationship between language and culture is one that is central to many discussions of intercultural education (Choi, 1997: 269-71; Jiang, 2000; Novera, 2004: 479-80; Tseng, 2002; Wong, 2004: 161-2; Yang, 2001). While linguistic problems are often mistaken for cultural problems (Piller, 2007: 218), the truth is that, for instructors in intercultural environments, the two concepts are inextricable (Flowerdew & Miller, 1995). Are students reluctant to speak in class because of a culture of respectful silence or because they cannot find the right words in English? Are assignments submitted late because of different time orientations or because writing essays in English is so difficult? Is cheating on tests the result a cultural predisposition to collaborative learning or a way of coping with texts whose language is too challenging? Is plagiarism a sign of a culture in which cheating is accepted or of difficulty paraphrasing and summarising and unfamiliarity with the conventions of referencing sources? The answers are never unambiguous.

On the first day of the term, I gave my students a diagnostic writing activity to help me gain some insight into their level of proficiency in English. When I saw the results of this activity, and again later as I heard them speak in class and read their assignments, I realised that their level of proficiency did not match my
expectations. The low level of proficiency in English became one of my foremost concerns. Without proper linguistic resources, students would be unable to cope with the texts, have difficulty formulating opinions, struggle to participate in discussions, and have trouble completing written assignments. There was no point in blaming students for the low language proficiency requirements at the university, so the only choice was to adapt by changing expectations regarding the accuracy of output and the way input was provided.

Other instructors facing similar difficulties have advocated a number of strategies to improve students’ ability to productively engage with texts at a level of linguistic complexity that is challenging for them. When course texts are in a foreign language, students are often more reliant on verbal exposition of texts by instructors (Flowerdew & Miller, 1995: 368-9). This seemed to be the case in my classes. My background in language teaching provided me with strategies to adjust my spoken input to the needs of L2 speakers, such as reducing the speed of delivery, simplifying language structures, increasing pauses and repetition, checking comprehension, and clarifying abstract concepts through the use of concrete examples, though it is important to remember that misunderstandings can still arise from differences in language interaction patterns.

My experience also supports the practice of providing textual support for spoken input. For students with an orientation toward textual learning, or where respect is placed in the authority of texts, such as rote learning environments, difficulty in understanding spoken input can be offset by providing more than normally detailed notes to accompany lectures (Flowerdew & Miller, 1995: 368-9)
Written texts allow students to adjust their engagement with content according to their level of proficiency. They can cover the content at different speeds and make use of tools such as dictionaries according to personal requirements. Arguably, texts are also a better source for vocabulary acquisition than spoken input. The danger with relying more heavily on textual support is that it is an invitation to merely repeat, often verbatim, what was given on a handout. This may, in turn, block any advance in higher-order thinking skills as well as give students a sense that they do not need to attend classes as they can always get the notes later.

While language is important for input, it is also important as output because it is the primary means of demonstrating learning in the form of assignments and other forms of assessment. Changing the nature of output was more difficult. The most obvious way of equipping students with the language skills to understand texts on their own, form opinions based on textual evidence, express opinions with confidence in the classroom, and produce written assignments to demonstrate their learning is to build their proficiency in the language. One way of doing this is to combine instruction in language and content, but this comes with a number of problems. First, teaching language alongside content risks overloading students. Second, using class time for language instruction means sacrificing time for building analytical skills related to content. Third, foregrounding language, such as by marking down writing or correcting mistakes, can shut down the confidence to communicate or encourage plagiarism.
With the students’ spoken output, I never even considered teaching language alongside content, with the exception of vocabulary. Since I was not willing to take time away from the content of the course to teach language, I decided to focus on building the students’ communicative competence by increasing their exposure to informal uses of the language in meaningful contexts through small-group discussion. This form of interaction maximises student production time and minimises anxiety levels. It shifts the emphasis from accuracy, most often associated with writing and controlled speaking, to fluency. Unfortunately, the only time when students consistently used English was when they had to address me, or when they were addressing the whole class in my presence.

Because the language of instruction at the university was English, it was generally assumed that all classroom discussion should be conducted in English. This was again paradoxical. Students made disparaging comments about instructors who allowed them to speak in Khmer, and they seemed to regard correcting their written English in minute detail one of my main responsibilities, but they staunchly refused to respond to my exhortations to use English in group discussions. The only way of dealing with this seemed to be to make a distinction between using Khmer to provide clarification – for example, to explain part of an assignment to another student – but to strive to use English for all other purposes.

To make such a rule is only to play at enforcing English in the classroom, but again it seemed as though students wanted me to appear in the role of
disciplinarian, because there was in practice no way of really telling when the use of Khmer was necessary, and given the amount of use, I would have had to assume that at least some students spoke very little English. This form of compromise had the benefit of putting value on using English (an understandable value in the context of a Bachelor of English Communication course) while allowing use of the mother tongue to make important points clear. However, it may have hindered the improvement of the most proficient and highly motivated students, as they faced social pressure not to use English from their less proficient and less motivated peers.

The realities of language in the Cambodian classroom had one more effect: it brought home the importance of continuous summary, revision, and formative assessment. When students are so reluctant to ask questions, when gauging their capacity to understand input due to widely different levels of ability, when the level of motivation to work outside of class to prepare for work in class is generally low, and also when students are continually absent, devising ways to measure student progress, both so they can set targets for themselves and so the instructor can decide on modifications to course content and methods, plan remedial instruction, inform the students of their progress toward predefined goals, and help students set goals for their own development, becomes essential. In the context of the intercultural classroom, where traditional means of measuring comprehension such as asking questions or assigning writing do not always work, this is also challenging.
Culture and Orientations to Learning

There was a film adaptation of Romeo and Juliet in the university’s library, and I decided to screen it at the end of the unit. I did it grudgingly after what seemed like resistance to engaging with the text and did not want it to be viewed as a substitute for the text itself. Expecting attendance to be lower than normal on the part of those who took the text and higher than normal on the part of those who had not attended many of the classes, it came as a surprise when nearly the whole class arrived early and noticeably enthusiastic. When the lights finally went down, there was level of attentiveness that was completely new: students whispered to each other as they identified characters, laughed out loud at the slapstick that had bored them in the text, and hushed each other when the noise got so loud that it became distracting.

The student-centered language classrooms that I knew from my prior teaching in Cambodia and my own experiences as a student of literature in Canada led me to expect classes where open discussion followed questions or comments either from the instructor or the students. The style of instruction familiar to most people in Anglo-Saxon countries involves "high levels of student participation, informal and egalitarian relations between students and professors, extended use of critical discussions in class, case-teaching and group work" (Kragh & Bislev, 2005). What I found in Cambodia were students who appeared
silent and passive, and I wondered if they were bewildered, uninterested, unwilling, or unable to participate actively in class discussions. My reluctance to adopt a more teacher-centred pedagogy was reinforced by a desire to encourage their own responses to class texts. More interactive classes were also important because language development was regarded as a secondary course objective and because I believed it would encourage critical thinking and cultural adaptation.

Much of the literature tends to confirm my observations about the differences between Anglo and Asian learning style preferences (Park, 2000) and teaching style preferences (Cothran, et. al., 2005). Following a review of the literature, Park (2000) sums up the general differences between Southeast Asian and Western classes as follows: Westerners view the lecturer as a facilitator, Southeast Asians as an authority figure; Westerners challenge and question, while Southeast Asians respect authority through silence; Westerners are motivated by personal desire to succeed, Southeast Asians by family pressure; Westerners value expression of individual opinions, Southeast Asians self-effacement; Westerners stress individuality and creativity, Southeast Asians conformity or a "group-orientation" to learning. Thus, classes in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam are traditionally "meagre but highly structured"; students listen to instructors, take copious notes, and learn by rote.

A number of explanations have been proposed for this uncommunicativeness. Many of these explanations draw implicitly or explicitly on Hofstede's cultural dimensions. The work of Hofstede and Hofstede (2005)
relates student reticence directly to the cultural dimensions of Power Distance, which leads students to accept teacher-centred pedagogy as the norm (53) and Uncertainty Avoidance, which leads students to favour receiving answers from instructors and to steer clear of answering questions that do not have one definitely correct answer (179). Other explanations include Asian students not wanting to disrupt group solidarity by “showing off,” which would seem to imply a Collectivistic orientation, not wanting to question authority and thereby insult instructors, which would seem to imply high Power Distance, not wanting to “lose face” in front of the group by displaying ignorance in asking questions or offering incorrect answers, and not wanting to waste the time of other students by asking questions to which they already know the answer (Cothran, et. al., 2005; Park, 2000: 247; Watson, 1998: 103).

Some authors have criticised the tendency to lump all Asians together into a single cultural category and label them as obedient to authority, lacking critical thinking skills, and unwilling participate in classroom discussions (Kumaravadivelu, 2003b; Littlewood, 2000). Some have noted that a lack of participation is also a concern in Western classrooms (Fassinger, 1995). Others have challenged the conception of Southeast Asian instructors as “didactic,” “authoritarian,” or “transmitters of knowledge” (Lewis & McCook, 2002; Phan, 2004). Explanations of student reticence independent of culture are possible, including overcrowded classes, undertrained teachers, irrelevant or inappropriate discussion topics, lack of confidence and motivation, low proficiency in the classroom language, and emphasis on reproductive knowledge for assessment
(Chalmers & Volet, 1997; Choi, 1997: 271-3; Hsieh, 2007; Kennedy, 2002; Kumaravadivelu, 2003b; McHugh, 1999; Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001; Singh & Doherty, 2004: 24-27). Many authors have also questioned the stereotype that Asian students’ passivity equates to a preference for shallow rote learning (Chalmers & Volet, 1997: 88-90; Chi Ng et al., 2002; Dooley, 2004: 234; Green, 2007: 329-334; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005: 216; Kennedy, 2002; Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001: 342; Remedios et al. 2008, 212; Wright & Lander, 2003: 246-9). Silence may denote a reflective approach that results in learning that can be, under some circumstances, just as deep as active students’ learning.

While many studies show that students in a number of high Power Distance, Collectivistic, or Uncertainty Avoidance cultures tend to favour a less democratic learning process, this is no reason to necessarily adopt a teacher-centred approach. To expect the same level of discussion as Western classes might be unrealistic, but to say that students are incapable of class discussion is to submit to an essentialised view in which people are totally determined by their culture and unable to grow or change. Students can change given time and support from instructors (Kennedy, 2002: 441; Khoo, 2003; Novera, 2004: 480-81; Wong, 2004: 165). More communicative approaches have been successful in my language classes though they might at first have seemed contrary to students’ preferred learning styles. Recognising cultural norms related to learning styles, however, is important for success in implementing more communicative approaches. To attempt to apply these approaches without addressing both the resistance caused by Power Distance, as well as the implications of unfamiliar
instructional paradigms with regard to Uncertainty Avoidance, is likely to lead to suboptimal results. As Bodycott and Walker (2000) note, trying to force an opinion out of students can cause social friction that actually shuts down communication (89).

When I first encountered silence in my classes, I shared the negative views of some authors but was willing to reach a compromise, leading me to many questions about the situation. First, what patterns of interaction were most effective? Did students find it easier to conduct discussions as a class, in small groups, or with partners? What balance of different patterns of interaction provided the best results? Second, what kinds of questions were the students most comfortable answering? Were they more comfortable with precise factual questions than more open questions? Was there any way to change the type of questions they would answer? Third, what was the best way to address questions to students? Was it better, for example, to address them to small groups or pairs first and then to address the same questions to the class as a whole? Finally, what kinds of questions were students most comfortable asking? Was there any way of encouraging more open questioning on the part of the students, either toward the class, to specific students in whole class interactions, or toward myself?

The literature on learning styles in Asia offers some suggestions for boosting student discussion. Many studies suggest, not surprisingly, that fostering a positive relationship with students is essential (Chi Ng et al., 2002: 472). Recent research has also tried to examine the relationship between
classroom communication apprehension, certain forms of immediacy, and cultural dimensions such as Power Distance and Individualism-Collectivism in such Asian countries as China and Japan (Neuliep, 1997; Zhang, 2005; Zhang & Zhang, 2005). This research suggests that cultural factors, such as maintaining hierarchal classroom relations based on high Power Distance, are actually more important in reducing classroom communication apprehension than Western conceptions of immediacy that stress small-talk, self-disclosure, and humour (Zhang, 2005: 119). One study suggests that instructor humour can actually increase communication apprehension because it contradicts the authoritative stance expected of instructors in high Power Distance cultures (Zhang, 2005: 113, 118). Another suggests that instructors in high Power Distance cultures demonstrate less immediacy with no negative consequences for learning outcomes because expectations for immediacy are lower (Neuliep, 1997: 447). Thus, working with some engrained cultural values, such as noting status hierarchies, can actually encourage change to certain culturally-mediated practices, such as low levels of participation in classroom discussion.

Another suggestion for encouraging participation in Collectivistic cultures is to privilege small-group interaction (Bodycott & Walker, 2000: 89-90; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005: 97; Ramburuth & McCormick, 2001: 338, 344-5). While definite questions can effectively be addressed to specific students (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005: 96-7), open questions are more effectively addressed to small groups. When students are given time to discuss together before offering their collective opinion to the entire class, this form of discussion allows collaboration,
increases communication, reduces anxiety, and also allows bolder students to act as the spokespeople for those who are reluctant to address the class. Students also appear more willing to challenge others when they belong to groups, and their exchanges are more lively and the results more complex when they discuss in their mother tongue (Bodycott & Walker, 2000: 90). The only downside to this approach was that more able students often dominated group discussions.

Despite my growing recognition of culture’s importance in defining expectations regarding student-teacher and student-student relationships, I was never able to foster classroom dialogue to my satisfaction. Why was it so difficult to elicit opinions about texts whose themes were so relevant to the students’ lives? Was it only a cultural orientation that made answering open-ended questions difficult even after group discussion? Was it also my own failure to promote a relationship with the class that would give them the confidence to engage in dialogue? Was it perhaps also the form of the text (i.e. written texts, or verse, rather than visual media) that stifled enthusiasm? Was it perhaps the context of the university itself, and the cultural rules that govern how to behave in that context, that shut down discussion? My experience indicates that a commitment to an “emphasis on students’ own unique cultural viewpoints” as a means to promoting discussion can paradoxically run up against preferences for patterns of interaction that are likely based on students’ own culture and that these preferences can be difficult to change.
**Classroom Management in an Intercultural Context**

When I walked past the open door of an older Filipina Ph.D. who taught in the class next to mine, I always noticed the throng of students waiting to talk to her at the end of class. Sometimes I would pass slowly and listen to their banter, and I was unfailingly impressed with her ability to be both friendly and serious. Students waited to ask me questions after class and many seemed to crave any sort of personal interaction with me. At first I thought they were just welcoming or curious, and I was flattered by the attention, but as they increasingly clamoured for favours, I wondered how to exercise discipline without becoming a disciplinarian.

There has been relatively little research conducted on classroom management in intercultural settings (Weinstein et al., 2004: 26). This is surprising given the almost exclusive focus of accounts by instructors in these settings on classroom conflicts (e.g. Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Crabtree & Sapp, 2004; Garson, 2005; MacLennan, 2000). Like these authors, I encountered many challenges related to classroom management, ranging from chronic lateness, private conversations in the local language, which contrasted sharply, and frustratingly, with the refusal to offer opinions in class discussions, an almost compulsive need to confer with peers during tests, as well as more traditional forms of academic dishonesty, such as crib notes and electronic communication during tests and exams.
My motivation to tackle these problems came from a sense of discomfort at the increasing feeling of negativity in the classroom. It was hard not to be annoyed by lateness, chatting, and cheating, and it was not always easy to suppress the disparaging remarks that came to mind in these situations, but denigrating a student’s language or culture can often only intensify resistance through disruptive behaviours (Weinstein et al., 2004: 31). There was also a community of expatriate instructors united by the discourse of upholding Western standards against tides of unprincipled Cambodian students who would cheat at every opportunity, and I could only imagine what the students themselves felt, as they sought expatriate instructors but resisted Western practices and as a consequence suffered Western cynicism. Accounts of similar reactions by an instructor in China later resonated strongly with me. Sapp (2002) describes his unwilling transformation into a tyrant in response to the tide of cheating in his classes. For anyone who values the positive relationships that develop in the classroom, it is hard to stomach making the classroom into a police-state to enforce certain behaviours that are assumed to safeguard academic integrity.

One of the things I tried to do to counter some of the practices that I viewed negatively was to build a positive relationship with my students. The commonsense assumption is that the better rapport you have with students the easier classroom management will be. Cambodian students often seem to have a two-sided view of what they want in an instructor. They are quick to dismiss anyone who does not seem knowledgeable, but they also desire closeness and sympathy. This observation is supported by research on Thai and Indonesian
perceptions of expatriates in higher education, which found that students reported personal qualities such as friendliness, patience, tolerance, and sensitivity as equally important to professional qualities such as subject knowledge and planning and organization (Cannon, 1991, 461) and observations about other Asian cultures in which instructors are viewed as personal mentors (Green, 2007: 329-334). Creating a positive relationship in intercultural environments, however, is a complex process that involves determining which behaviours have positive effects.

My experience was that I had to experiment with different strategies to build a rapport with my students. What is defined as a good rapport by most Westerners, which includes friendliness and informality, does not always yield positive results in other cultures. For example, Crabtree and Sapp (2004) found that physical proximity, frequent touching, and personal conversation between instructors and students were more important to their Brazilian students than the more "polite" North American smiling, eye-contact, and listening (120). Yet, behaviours such as physical proximity especially between the sexes are viewed negatively in many Asian cultures (Powell & Harville, 1990: 370), and interactions with my Cambodian students confirmed this difference. Thus, the variables affecting relationships between instructors and students are complex and have to be navigated in the context of ongoing learning.

While my own experience showed that sharing information about myself, engaging students in informal conversation, and expressing sympathy for the burdens of student life resulted in a more positive classroom atmosphere, I also
found it more useful to retain a professional distance for the purposes of classroom management. With the influence of postcolonial theory and critical pedagogy, many authors on intercultural learning environments have advocated reducing "the power and authority customarily enjoyed" by instructors to foster positive encounters and reduce anxiety (Crabtree & Sapp, 2004: 124). This way of thinking ignores cultural factors such as Power Distance. Closing the personal distance between instructors and students in large Power Distance cultures can actually generate student anxiety (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005: 178-80, 272). Thus, other authors have reported meeting resistance to closing the power gap (e.g. Garson, 2005; Viranten et al., 2006). Being friendly and informal brought waves of positive feedback my first day, but I soon discovered that students responded better when I was more strict and formal.

One instance when classroom management became a foremost concern was during tests and exams. Other authors have noted their shock at the extent of cheating in neighbouring countries at these times and the sense of powerlessness in opposing it (Ferguson, 2008: 154). Cheating took many forms in my classes, from blatant talking, to notes scribbled on hands, to carefully concealed note papers, to electronic communication, to coordinated efforts to distract me so that messages could be exchanged. Taking a draconian approach did not work in this context; more important than rules was group harmony (Sapp, 2002). Even the best students, who do not need to cheat, will help the others by making their papers visible. To do otherwise would be to opt out of the system to which the majority of other students in the class belong. Perhaps as a result of
my Individualist culture, which tends to favour measuring each person’s learning, I believed that at least part of the course’s assessment scheme had to be individual in nature. The only way to accomplish this was therefore to engineer the class so as to make cheating more of a challenge. This entailed making alternate versions of the same exams and relying on short-answer and essay-type questions.

Although the idea of "negotiation" is a common concept in discussions of classroom management, my previous experience in Cambodia did not bode well for the practice of coming to class without any clear idea of what to expect and negotiating it with the students. In line with the concept of high Power Distance, which is characteristic of Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand and Vietnam, it is common for those in subordinate positions to expect clear direction from those in superordinate positions in social hierarchies. Implementing the ideal of negotiation therefore became a ritual, and yet another example of roleplay, as students espoused high ideals in negotiations but did not put them into practice. Therefore, this was one instance in which I surrendered my initial desire for friendly and informal relations and adapted to what seemed to be students’ greater responsiveness to strictness and formality, though I continued to wonder what impact non-cultural factors such as my age had on my relationship with students.
Academic Writing in an Intercultural Context

Many of the assignments were word-for-word the same. Others showed signs of paraphrasing. A few were cut and pasted from the Internet. The issue seemed simple to me – no one should receive credit for work that was not completed individually – but the administration was sympathetic to the students’ complaints. “My friend copied my assignment, so why should I get zero?” Who should bear responsibility copying? “They worked together, so they should share a score.” Was this really just a way of making sure everyone passed? “It takes some effort for students to find information on the Internet, so shouldn’t they get some marks?” Was the logic of this argument as surreal as it seemed?

The issue of standards in writing has preoccupied many authors on intercultural education (Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999; Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Crabtree & Sapp, 2004; Ferguson, 2008; MacLennan, 2002; Sapp, 2002; Viranten et al., 2006). This preoccupation is understandable given the different levels of English proficiency in many international classes and the variation in writing conventions in different cultures. Two of the ongoing concerns expressed in my narratives of teaching writing in Cambodia were how to help students meet my expectations for academic writing and how to counter the high incidence of plagiarism.
These may seem to be two distinct issues, but they are again intricately interconnected. Were students more prone to plagiarise because they felt unable to meet instructor expectations regarding academic writing? Was the low level of linguistic ability evident in their academic writing one reason for the many examples of plagiarism? Were students cognisant of the requirements for academic writing, or were they responding to their uncertainty by resorting to plagiarism? Was there a culture, perhaps with its roots all the way back in primary school, in which plagiarism was considered permissible? The answers were again never unambiguous.

My basic assumptions were that students would take responsibility for completing assignments on time, approach me in advance with any problems, and submit writing that showed evidence of critical engagement with texts. What surprised me most in the first batch of assignments was the striking similarity between many of the assignments. Many articles attest to the perception of Western authors that plagiarism is a particularly acute problem in a number of Asian cultures (Bodycott & Walker, 2000; Colvin, 2007; Robinson & Kuin, 1999; Sapp, 2002).

What was labelled plagiarism was actually a large number of activities. The most glaring was simply copying from the Internet or books. At other times, it was slightly more subtle, with large chunks copied, with bridging provided by the student, but it was equally obvious given the disparity in the level of linguistic accuracy between the sections. The most difficult was when it seemed a small group had put in a collective effort to produce something that was virtually
identical in terms of argumentative structure with significant differences in phrasing.

How to deal with these instances of plagiarism was a difficult question. Others have adapted to high incidences of plagiarism in overseas classrooms by assuming a relativistic stance. For example, Sap (2000) attempts to see the problem of plagiarism (and cheating in general) from his students' perspective. He states that he is "sympathetic" to them because they only need English for standardised tests and cheating is a "life skill" that will allow them to advance in the corrupt business environment in China.

My own values prevented me from accepting copied assignments, but I was constrained in my range of options by the prevalence of the practice and the attitude of the administration. Thus, I was caught between two unacceptable alternatives. On the one hand, I could pit myself against the students and administration in a futile battle to uphold my ideals. On the other, I could allow plagiarism by cynically and indifferently assigning passing grades. Finding a third alternative was another challenge that involved both pedagogic and cultural adaptation.

The detection of plagiarism can be regarded as an educational opportunity (Colvin, 2007). Some have suggested that it is best to seek cultural accommodation on the part of their students, not by imposing external rules, but by explicitly seeking to increase cultural consciousness through discussing the instructor's cultural norms (Weinstein et al., 2004: 33). Unfortunately, talking about cultural norms is not always sufficient to change them, and I found that
negotiating changes to this behaviour was ineffective. While students publicly avowed that copying was wrong, and perhaps even believed what they were saying, many persisted in the behaviour and argued that they should receive credit for assignments that they had obviously not completed on their own.

My willingness to explore the reasons for plagiarism and to seek means of resolving the conflict over the issue were sustained by a recognition that writing is a very complex task, one that even native speakers have difficulty with at an advanced level, and that academic writing is uniquely challenging for students in intercultural learning environments (Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999). Even when they showed no signs of being copied from peers or other sources, most assignments were characterised by what for me was a surprising lack of formal organisation and critical thought, with many consisting of bald plot summaries. Rather than simply discuss the gravity with which plagiarism is treated in my culture, I therefore changed my approach to the teaching of writing in order to improve the overall quality of academic writing in the class and hopefully counter the high incidence of plagiarism.

Studies have shown that Asian international students face confusion as to the purpose and nature of academic writing in a Western context (Green, 2007: 329-30), to misunderstand Western conventions related to the structure and implied audience of academic writing (Green, 2007: 329-336), and to have difficulties with formatting and providing references to secondary texts (Wong, 2004: 161), as the conventions for referencing can differ between countries (Anyanwu, 2004).
Scholars have also noted that a student’s whole relationship with texts, as influenced by their educational upbringing, can differ from what is familiar to most Westerners (Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999: 494). The critical tradition of textual analysis in the West, for example, may be uncomfortable for students who have a more respectful orientation to textual authority (Green, 2007: 329-335). These students may seem to resist voicing personal opinions or deliberately present only one side of an argument so as to avoid appearing quarrelsome.

Listening to students brought to light the deep uncertainty they felt as to how to approach written assignments. Students from a number of Asian cultures in international contexts have been found to regard Western instructors’ expectations as opaque and to dread essay writing due to a lack of definitive and comprehensive directions (Green, 2007: 329-335-6; Wong, 2004: 161). Learning to be absolutely clear (Powell & Harville, 1990) regarding details of assignments, timetables, and assessment criteria was one means of supporting students’ efforts to improve their academic writing.

A second adaptation involved shifting to group work to accommodate rather than resist the powerful force of culture. Some scholars have noted that in Collectivistic cultures learning is viewed as a more collaborative exercise. Park (2000) found that Cambodians showed a marked preference for group, rather than individual, learning activities (263-4). Trying to understand plagiarism from the students’ point of view was of course a matter of guesswork, but they seemed to regard “collaboration” as their right and reacted negatively to any punitive action against those who completed assignments through collective effort.
Overcoming the Western tendency to assess individual ability, while encouraging strong individual contributions to collective assignments, was another way of affecting a compromise that allowed me to navigate between the Scylla of cultural conflict and the Charybdis of cynical cultural relativism. Yet, it was not a perfect solution, as collaborative writing assignments, though they have the effect of limiting plagiarism, comes with a host of other difficulties. Group projects are often no more than an amalgamation of individual work; assigning group scores can be unfair when a small number of group members carry the entire group; and the selection of group members poses many challenges (Strauss & U, 2007: 149-56).

The final adaptation involved finding ways to embed the teaching and learning of academic writing into the course, as providing explicit instructions and sanctioning collaborative assignments would not solve the problem of students not fully understanding how to do academic writing successfully in a Western context. This situation led me to adopt a process-based approach to academic writing in which students received modelling, examples, and precise assessment criteria at each step of the composition process in order to give them the knowledge and confidence to execute subsequent assignments independently.

In summary, the nature of my adaptations to conflicting expectations regarding academic writing was mixed. I attempted to change my own practice in order to accommodate students’ seeming preference for collaborative assignments, but as I was not aware of any conventions related to the nature, structure, format, or referencing of academic writing in the Cambodian context, I
largely sought to instigate student accommodation to Western conventions of academic writing by providing detailed instructions and adopting a process-based approach to assignments.

The outcome of these adaptations, like that for my attempts to foster greater classroom dialogue, did not lead to a radical transformation. With willingness to change, better understanding through instructor support, and extensive practice, students have been shown to adapt successfully to Western standards of academic writing (Wong, 2004: 164-6). However, I was constrained by the limited timeframe of a single term, and though I saw a marked improvement in the quality of many students’ writing over the term, these gains were uneven and the issue of plagiarism continued to dog individual assignments.

Cultures and Organisations

For the whole term, a student representative, selected by the students themselves, had been keeping attendance records. Every day, I had been required to sign a log that had been impossible to verify given the class size and the number of students who came late or left early. The final record was presented to me at term’s end, and I was again required to sign to certify its accuracy. The tabulation was what I had expected. Despite what everyone knew, this record made out that no one had missed more than a few classes all term. No administrator would have to acknowledge that there was a problem. No instructor
would be able to bring up the issue of attendance to justify scores. No student would have to bear responsibility for chronic absence. We would all just pretend to be taking it seriously.

Navigating the cultural territory of the foreign classroom is difficult, but it must be remembered that the classroom is contained in such larger structures as the university. Within universities, many authors speak of unique student subcultures, faculty subcultures, and disciplinary subcultures (Välimaa, 1998: 128). These organizational cultures and subcultures are distinct from national cultures (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005: 284).

Organizational cultures consist of practices learned later than the values associated with national cultures, and they are therefore said to be more “superficial” than national cultures (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005: 284). Nevertheless, the practices that comprise university cultures, as well as the various subcultures that exist within them, have a major impact on shaping classroom dynamics and are perhaps inextricable from the national cultures in which they are embedded.

Working at the university gave me a sense of inhabiting radically different cultural territory. Many of the administrative processes there seemed to arise from national culture; they supported learning style preferences and academic behaviours that are typically associated with Southeast Asian students; but it is impossible to establish the direction of causality, and it is equally possible that
the university’s own culture was at the heart of many of the issues that caused conflict between instructors and students.

The university’s structuring of the student experience seemed to be in response to or to play a role in shaping many of the behaviours that I found frustrating. That the students all studied together, rather than selecting individual courses that interested them, perhaps promotes student solidarity in a way that does not exist in many Western universities. The cultural tendency not to stress individual choice, but to follow clearly laid down rules in response to power hierarchies, seems to parallel student reluctance to select individual assignment topics and may have contributed to passivity, cheating, and plagiarism.

There was also a sense that the administration supported students in many of the areas of conflict between students and instructors. The problem of low levels of proficiency in English, which has been implicated in so many of the so-called cultural conflicts in intercultural learning environments, was directly related to the university’s lax admission requirements and absence of foundation courses. The sense that students do not need to know English to study in English was reinforced by the university’s implicit support for students who never completed readings outside of class and encouragement of instructors to summarise readings and gloss vocabulary as a substitute for more meaningful forms of classroom interaction.

Other examples show the administration taking the side of the students, isolating the instructor, such as when students are allowed to keep their own attendance records. This lack of support seems like active complicity in many
cases where students who have cheated on tests or copied assignments simply
go to meet the administration, talk of withdrawing from the school, and receive
makeup assignments, making more work for instructors, or simply have their
grades upgraded without the instructor’s knowledge.

The same sense of complicity characterised the university’s policies
regarding the all important final examinations. One of the office assistants, who
was also one of my students, was entrusted with the task of overseeing the
preparation of exam papers leading many to wonder whether students had
advance knowledge exams. Local instructors were given the job of invigilating
exams for all classes, and while expatriate instructors were expected to grade
these exams, the university held a second “makeup exam” graded by local
instructors for students who did not pass. All this gave many expatriate
instructors the feeling that the administration was aiming to maximise pass rates
while avoiding conflict with expatriate instructors.

The lack of enforcement of university policies by the administration, as
well as the frequent “helping” of students by the administration, often seemed like
another manifestation of cultural conflict. The authority of expatriate instructors,
and the consequent respect they commanded from students, was continuously
undermined by the unspoken understanding that the administration would make
exceptions to every policy in order to placate students. This often led to the
feeling that what happened in terms of grades did not matter, that "everyone
passes anyway," and that the university was primarily interested in maximising
enrolment.
Operating effectively within this environment was not impossible, but making the kinds of concessions necessary to maintain productive relationships with students and administration can be one of the hardest things to do for Western instructors, whose self-concept is intricately bound up with their Western education. Reconceptualising the nature of education is complicated by the validation of education through institutions and the status hierarchies they enforce. It is assumed that equivalent credentials should consist of equivalent measures of achievement. To benchmark success at context-dependent intervals can therefore seem like a betrayal of educational ideals and thereby debase the instructor in his or her own eyes. A pragmatic approach cognisant of the realities not only of educational standards in context but also the realities of everyday life for students in other cultures was therefore also essential to accepting these concessions.

DISCUSSION: EMERGENT THEMES

The preceding sections have focussed on a number of common plotlines in the literature on intercultural education. They have outlined issues identified by many authors, particularly in the Asian region, that are believed to impact teaching and learning in an intercultural context. They have also attempted to evaluate the usefulness of many of the strategies advocated by numerous authors for dealing with many of these issues in the light of my own experience in one more particular intercultural learning environment. A number of emergent
themes cut across more than one of these sections, and it is my intention to discuss four of these themes here.

The first of these themes was introduced at the beginning as a frame for the sections related to more specific pedagogic adaptations. This theme is the sense that as an instructor in an intercultural learning environment I occupied a paradoxical subject position as both an empowered authority and disempowered outsider. While expatriate instructors often occupy positions of privilege in the developing world, my narratives evinced a more persistent sense of disempowerment. As an expatriate instructor, particularly in a monocultural environment, I was expected to adapt. While my students wanted expatriate instructors, and they stated they valued expatriate instructors for standards that for better or worse would give their education credibility, they seemed to downplay the need for their own adaptation to my expectations.

Thus, in many of the sections following my initial discussion of this common plotline in the literature on intercultural education, I discussed my frustration at unsuccessful attempts to encourage adaptation on the part of the students and the conflicts that ensued. These encounters occurred on a wide range of issues, from arriving on time, to reading at home, to completing assignments on time, to playing an active part in classroom discussions, to cheating and plagiarism. The same sense of disempowerment prevailed with regard to my relationship with the university, whose practices often seemed so foreign, and which provided little support for instructors’ attempts to change
prevailing norms related to, for example, cheating and plagiarism and in many cases seemed to provide unspoken support for these norms.

The second of these themes, or the sense that navigating intercultural contact situations is analogous to a form of roleplay, is perhaps a natural reaction to the nature of intercultural adaptation. As instructors observe students, struggle to suspend culturally biased judgements and appreciate students’ points of view, and negotiate changes to certain behaviours or adapt to local norms by changing they own behaviour, what they are doing in many cases is consciously adopting a role to match their understanding of specific circumstances. There is another sense, however, in which roleplay is more than adaptation.

There were times when what was publicly stated seemed to contradict the way students acted and the administration’s actual understanding. Students disavowed such practices as cheating and plagiarism, but then engaged en mass in such practices. They affirmed the rectitude of attentiveness, participation, and attendance, but then missed classes, arrived late, and sat silently or chatted in hushed tones in Khmer. Thus, I often had the sense that I was expected to behave as though I would strictly enforce submission dates for assignments, as though I rejected plagiarism, and as though I would not tolerate cheating during tests and exams, but also to behave quite differently in practice. There seemed to be an expectation, perhaps derived from a tendency toward high-context communication, that instructors would pick up on unspoken rules, understand that public proclamations do not always translate into practice, and not risk loss of face by making an issue of the inconsistency between image and reality.
The theme of conflict between personal values and cultural relativism goes to the heart of discussions of culturally responsive pedagogy. Intercultural communication theory is premised on cultural relativism (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005: 5-6). The abstract values of one culture are supposed to be no better or worse than any other. With some of these abstract values, such as Individualism and Collectivism, it is easy to accept that the poles of these orientations are different but equally valid.

Other abstract values can be harder for people to accept, such as high Power Distance in low Power Distance cultures that value egalitarianism, and in some cases it is impossible to maintain a relativistic stance, especially with regard to some of the concrete practices that are associated with these abstract dimensions. For an instructor who believes that certain teaching styles are instruments of oppression (Freire, 1970), for example, it can be difficult to accept that students from some cultures prefer what seem like precisely these teaching styles. This can be true even when the behaviours do not seem to have any connection to a national culture, or perhaps even to an organisational culture, because of the feeling that as an outsider you have no right to insist on changes to group norms in a foreign country.

When these conflicts between personal values and cultural relativism occur, those who are so intransigent that they can never compromise risk causing irreparable harm to their relations with members of the other culture. Certain engrained practices, such as arriving to class without having done assigned readings, were so intractable, and there was so little support from the
administration, that it was not worth seriously damaging my relations with students to get my way. Thus, in some cases, I was able to suspend my own beliefs about the “right way” of doing things and submit to the norms that prevailed in my classes.

Yet, other behaviours were almost impossible for me to take a relativistic stance on, and this is one of the points on which much of the literature describing intercultural learning environments is all too silent. The enthusiastic accounts of adapting to new cultural environments, empowering students, valuing students’ unique cultural perspectives, and coolly negotiating agreements to changes in practice, many authors are silent on the fundamental conflicts that characterise intercultural relations in the classroom. For me, there was no way to accept plagiarism or cheating; there were means of adapting to their pervasiveness, such as stressing group work, but no way of accepting them.

The final theme is that much of what goes by the name culturally responsive pedagogy involves compromises that may not promote effective learning but that circumvent conflict with students from other cultures rather than strategies to promote effective learning by recognising and adapting to the influence of culture on teaching and learning styles. The most salient example from the literature is probably some authors’ (e.g. Sap, 2002) affectation of a relativistic stance on plagiarism.

My own experiences of compromise include allowing students to complete readings in class as a concession to accepted practice at the university and the student norm of completing minimal study outside the class, which deprived
those who were motivated to complete readings independently of more meaningful use of class time, and allowing minimal use of Khmer in small-group discussions as a concession to the practice of lax level placement testing, which deprived those who had a stronger command of English and greater motivation to practice it of additional opportunities to use the language for meaningful communication in the classroom.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis is based on retrospective personal narratives related to my own attempt to evolve a culturally responsive pedagogy at one university in Cambodia. By using Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) method of narrative inquiry, I was able to use emblematic stories, or critical incidents, to explore my own attempts to develop a culturally responsive pedagogy. This approach allowed me to take a holistic view of my own experience of one specific intercultural learning environment by attending to the three interrelated narrative inquiry dimensions of continuity (i.e. critical incidents in the past, the experience of excavating these memories in the present, and the question of the future relevance of these experiences), situation (i.e. the physical space, at the level of the classroom, the university, the community, and the nation, on which the inquiry is focussed), and interaction (i.e. the personal and social dynamics involved in the narratives).

In the process of composing these narratives, I also engaged with studies on a variety of specific intercultural learning environments around the world with a particular emphasis on Asia. This engagement with relevant literature helped
me to identify several common plotlines in the literature on intercultural education, allowing me to dialectically develop my own understanding of intercultural classroom interactions narratively, but also to interrogate some of the common plotlines in the literature on intercultural education, including the cultural appropriateness of curricula, the implementation of student-centred practices in traditionally teacher-centred educational cultures, the relationship between language and culture, the issue of power in classroom management, and the problem of academic (dis)honesty.

In the process of “relentless rereading” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000: 131) that characterised the shift from field text to research text, I consciously engaged with the theoretical literature on intercultural communication theory, and I also tried to isolate emergent themes in my own narratives, which included the navigation of intercultural contact situations as a form of role play, the conflict between personal values and cultural relativism, and the tension involved in occupying subject positions that are simultaneously empowering and disempowering. This process of composing narratives regarding critical incidents in one specific intercultural learning environment, while dialectically engaging with the literature on other intercultural learning environments, and analysing these narratives through the lens of intercultural communication theory, while attempting to isolate emergent themes, has resulted in a paper with several interdependent outcomes.

First, many authors recognise that narratives based on personal experience have the potential to change practice, but it should also be noted that
indirect experience, through reading the narratives of other practitioners, can also lead to changes in practice (Hones, 1998: 242). As Verhesschen (2003) notes, “The narrative gets its completion in the reader and leads to a refiguration, a transformation of the thinking and acting of the reader” (456). Thus, narratives from the classroom have the potential to transform relations for readers as well as authors of narratives of intercultural conflict in the classroom and thereby contribute to effective and ethical pedagogy on a larger scale.

Second, the engagement with intercultural communication theory allowed me to test, not the validity or reliability of intercultural communication theory per se, but to the utility of concepts such as Hofstede’s cultural dimensions, as heuristic devices that can be effectively deployed in the complex and uncertain process of intercultural hermeneutics. While causality can never be established between abstract national-level cultural dimensions and concrete human behaviours, these concepts can prove useful in instructors’ attempts to understand the cultural contexts in which they are located and to adapt to these contexts by evolving a repertoire of strategies that constitutes a culturally responsive pedagogy sensitive to the unique matrix of myriad interpersonal, structural, and cultural factors that impact classroom relations.

Third, the engagement with texts on specific intercultural learning environments allowed me to evaluate the usefulness of specific classroom strategies in the light of my own lived experience. Many studies in the literature on culturally responsive pedagogy take as their purpose the enumeration of particular pedagogic adaptations to specific cultural contexts. These adaptations
are related to approaches to class texts, ways of dealing with language barriers, strategies for fostering classroom discussion, issues in classroom management, and challenges in the teaching of academic writing, among other things. Many of the strategies discussed have been advocated by multiple authors, but have been challenged for perpetuating cultural stereotypes. The fact that the same “misconceptions” and “misunderstandings” have continued to be challenged in the same way suggests that these cultural differences have some basis in experience. It also suggests that very little headway has been made in understanding these behaviours and that with increasing internationalization there is a continuing need to investigate how culture impacts teaching and learning and specific strategies for effective and ethical education in an intercultural context.

Fourth, by analysing my own narratives related to the development and application of these strategies through the lens of intercultural communication theory, I was able to propose emergent themes, based on my own experience, which contributes to a picture of the phenomenological experience of developing culturally responsive pedagogy or engaging in intercultural hermeneutics. These themes include the paradoxical subject position occupied by the expatriate instructor in a monocultural overseas classroom, the sense that navigating intercultural contact situations is often akin to a form of role play, the conflict between cultural relativism and personal values, and the problem of compromise in the classroom not serving to promote effective education but rather, to avoid
conflict with members of another culture, and the impact these things had on the evolution and implementation of a culturally responsive pedagogy.

Finally, the engagement with the literature on culturally responsive pedagogy, as well as a wide range of studies of various intercultural learning environments, allowed me to question the nature of culturally responsive pedagogy itself. The first outcome regarding the nature of culturally responsive pedagogy is that the “response” can take numerous forms. These can range from willing compromise, as when I allocated time for reviewing readings in class, to changing my own practice to suit the students’ preferred learning style, as when I experimented with collaborative writing assignments, to seeking adaptation on the part of students, as when I tried out a process-based approach to teaching writing. It is this combination of accommodation of student behaviours, adaptation to student preferences, and commitment to developing the capacity of students to function in an intercultural learning environment by learning about other cultural norms that characterises the nature of culturally responsive pedagogy.

One of the main conclusions of this paper, however, is that culturally responsive pedagogy consists of much more than the application of specific strategies. Without awareness of the specific learning environment in which an instructor is involved, as well as the particular needs of his or her specific group of students, strategies such as those found in the literature are insufficient. A culturally responsive pedagogy is not implemented but evolves from continuous observation, reflection, and experimentation in a context of high uncertainty and, in many cases, psychological stress. The evolution of a culturally responsive
pedagogy parallels the development of intercultural competence in the three stages identified by Hofstede and Hofstede (2005: 358-61), from the stage of awareness, as the instructor recognises that culture infuses both teaching and learning, to the stage of knowledge, as the instructor learns how culture impacts his or her own teaching style and the students’ learning, to the stage of skills, as the instructor learns specific strategies, such as those discussed throughout this paper, that are applicable to the specific intercultural learning environment in order to improve learning. Thus, culturally responsive pedagogy could be characterised as a “post-method” that is “sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a: 34).
NOTES

1 The names of many private universities currently operating in Cambodia also attest to their attempts at international branding. Examples of such universities include Build Bright University, Cambodia Mekong University, International University of Cambodia, Life University, Norton University, Phnom Penh International University (which occupies the premises of the former ASEAN University), Singapore International Training College, Asia Euro University, and Western University.


3 The original four cultural dimensions were Individualism-Collectivism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Masculinity-Femininity. In addition to expanding the scope of the survey to include seventy-four countries, Hofstede also later added a fifth dimension, Long-versus Short-term Orientation, after deepening work on cultural differences in China. Recently, he noted that a sixth dimension, Dependence on Others, might be necessary to explain the need for guidance from in-group members (Hofstede, 2007: 18-9).

4 As Matsumoto and Yoo note in a recent review of the literature (2006: 235), several other authors have developed schematics similar to the one developed by Hofstede: "Schwartz (2004) has uncovered seven universal value orientations; Smith, Dugan, and Trompenaars (1996) have reported two universal value orientations; House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, and Gupta (2003) have reported nine value orientations related to leadership; Inglehart (1997) has reported two attitude-belief-value orientations; and Bond et al. (2004) have reported two dimensions of social axioms." Nevertheless, Hofstede's cultural dimensions remain the most commonly used in research on education utilising intercultural communication theory.

5 Because of cultural differences in regions that have traditionally been grouped together, Hofstede (2007) cautions, "Neither 'the East' nor 'Asia' nor 'the West' are culturally homogeneous categories. Cross-cultural research should not generalize above the country level, and in large countries like China, India, Indonesia and Brazil it should, if possible, separate regions or provinces" (18). However, groupings can be formed on the basis of previous research, and this has been done, for example, with the "Anglo countries," Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Hofstede, 2007: 18). In the absence of previous research, experience provides a guide for which observations hold true in various Asian countries.

6 Stephan J. Duggan reports that in 1994, then Minister of Education, Ung Huot, resolved to break the cycle of corruption plaguing the education sector. He ensured teachers could not accept bribes on the day of the national examination. He did so by assigning teachers to different schools at the last minute and posting soldiers around all of the schools. The tactic had shocking results. The pass rate of 84 percent in the previous year was reduced to 7 percent (Duggan, 1997: 14). The current crop of Cambodian university students would have just been entering primary school at the time. Unfortunately, media reports still routinely expose the corruption at play in the primary and secondary education sectors.


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