Case studies of integrated pedagogy in vocational education: A three-tier approach to empowering vulnerable youth in urban Cambodia

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1. Introduction

In view of the real-life issues pertaining to the economic, educational and socio-cultural vulnerability of young people in Cambodia, both national and international education policies recently have shown their growing interest in vocational education (VE), as evidenced in Cambodia’s policy paper ‘Draft National Technical and Vocational Education and Training Development Plan’ (MoLVT, 2006), World Bank’s development report ‘World Development Report 2007: Development and the Next Generation’ (World Bank, 2006b) and ‘Youth and the Millennium Development Goals: Challenges and Opportunities for Implementation’ (The Ad Hoc Working Group for Youth and the MDGs, 2005). Distinct from the first international call for vocational education in the 1960s, a greater integrated stance in vocational education is now taken into account, in order to reflect over and confront with the global overemphasis on general primary education (MoEYS, 2004a,b; MoEYS, 2005a,b; MoP, 2003). The latter in response to the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially Goal Two of achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE), has produced more educated unemployed or under-employed youth in Cambodia. In fact, the underemployment rate in the country was about 38% in 2001 and has remained almost unchanged since then (EIC, 2006). Among those underemployed, the majority are young who have not taken advantages of the country’s emerging employment opportunities in garment production and tourism, which are the main sources of current economic growth in Cambodia (EIC, 2005a;b; World Bank, 2006a). Garment manufacturing has contributed 18.1% in 2003, 19.2% in 2004 and 18.6% in 2006 to the country’s GDP (Chen et al., 2008), and demanded labours’ skills for at least three job subcategories: production workers, production supervision, and production management and office (USAID, 2006b). By comparison, tourism-related services refer to hotels, restaurants, transportation, entertainment, communication, construction and so on (World Bank, 2006a) and have represented up to 8.5% of GDP in 2003, 11.5% in 2004 and 13.4% in 2005 (Chen et al., 2008). Although primary education presently plays a key role in the entry-level jobs of both sectors, the latter demands for core skills, technical skills, social skills and industry knowledge however have not been met by Cambodia’s primary curriculum (USAID, 2006a; Mansfield, 2008).

The Kingdom of Cambodia has a very young demographic structure: about 70% of the total 14.9 million population are under 30 years old, and 26.3% are aged between 14 and 30 (ADB, 2000; Wallquist, 2002; World Bank, 2007a). Youth has no legal definition but refers to those between 14 and 30 years old, according to the Youth Department, under the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS). Their suffering from socio-economic inequality is overtly higher in urban hubs than in rural areas, because it is in the cities where the largest disparity between rich and poor is found (World Bank, 2007b). Socio-cultural barriers, such as severe corruption, poor legal and juridical environment, familial responsibility and economic compulsion of young people often block their path to education and employment. For those who get employed, there are no significant gender differences in the time-intensity and type of employment across different age groups (NIS, 2000; World Bank, 2006c).

The conceptualisation of vulnerable young people, according to the definition by Corvalan (1984), refers to ‘socially and economically disadvantaged young persons, who have either
never entered school or have dropped out early in their lives, (and who) do not possess a qualified and relatively permanent occupation and have not had access to educational and training opportunities’ (Corvalan, 1984:3). Negative factors such as the high cost of education, recurring unemployment and constant under-employment have inevitably led young people to develop a negative attitude towards life, with low self-esteem and expectations, and a sense of depression, frustration and fatalism (Corvalan, 1984; Leonardos, 1999). More than 20 years after Corvalan produced his paper, vulnerable youths in the current era of MDG are indeed not only haunted by the old issues of physical and affordable access to education, but also beset by new problems of relevant and meaningful access to education (Bray and Bunly, 2005; UNESCO, 2004; World Bank, 2005).

Thus, the core research question of this study is to explore what constitutes an integrated pedagogy of vocational education for vulnerable young people’s employment and empowerment in the Cambodian urban context. To answer the question, the paper first demands analysis and reflection of the ideas and philosophies of integrated VE pedagogy set out in the existing literature. Based on the existing ideas, in Section 3 the research strategy and methods of exploring the pedagogical constituents of integrated VE programmes in Cambodia are designed. Accordingly, a three-tier approach to empowering vulnerable young people is found in Section 4, followed by the discussion over how the integrated VE pedagogy in Cambodia meets their economic, educational and socio-cultural needs in Section 5.

2. Integrated pedagogy of vocational education (VE)

Vocational education has its historical and ideological roots in the West. The idea of vocational education can be traced back to western educators and theorists such as Plato, Aristotle, Heidegger, Dewey, Oakeshott, Arendt, Polanyi and Kerschensteiner (Dewey, 1916; Arendt, 1958; Polanyi, 1958; Oakeshott, 1962; Lum, 2004; Lewis, 2005; Winch, 2006). They adopt the common position of backing the pedagogic integration and incorporation of practical knowledge and academic studies, thus linking vocational training and general education. Nevertheless, the ideal pedagogy of vocational education rooted in the above theoretical position has been constantly challenged in both industrial and developing countries. Integrating pedagogy is considered as rhetorical and ‘unseasonable’ in contemporary societies, especially when it confronts the political drive to improve the economic relevance of vocational education. This is not to forget that it is questionable whether pedagogy rooted in the West is context-appropriate to non-western societies, and whether it could be well managed in developing countries.

As Watson (1994) points out, the planning and management of vocational education in developing countries have been shaped by the World Bank, UNESCO-IIEP and ILO in particular, and their aid policies in education. Far from the original idea of empowering and promoting the economic, social and personal development of individuals, vocational education has been negatively perceived as a second-class programme or a passive remedial course in response to the unemployment, demographic growth and urbanisation that have emerged rapidly since the 1960s. In other words, vocational education was once upon a time demanded by international aid agencies because it looked like a quick solution to the problems just addressed (King, 2007; Okwuanaso, 1985; Oketch, 2007). That notwithstanding, in the 1990s the Bank led a radical shift in funding policies away from vocational education to general education. Whether coincident or not, in the early 1990s general education was stressed instead, and gained in importance and popularity after the World Conferences on Education for All in 1990 and the UN Millennium Development Goals (especially Goal Two of achieving Universal Primary Education) in 2000.

Having understood the VE challenges and constraints, a call is made to renew the active and holistic view of vocational education in the face of the ever more complex and changing world of work (UNESCO, 2005). The discussion over the renewal of vocational education is centred around the people’s need for not only ‘education to make a living’ but also ‘education for living’ (Singh, 2005). To do so, what the renewal of vocational education suggests is to supply knowledge and skills tailor-made to respond to the demands of the labour market and the interests of target groups, and in turn to reinforce their personal development and wider socio-political, cultural and moral engagement (Winch, 2000; Winch, 2006). In short, to empower people. Empowerment refers to enabling individuals to question and challenge the structural reasons for their social and economic disparity, to develop their personal confidence, self-esteem and identity, to shape decisions affecting their lives and to better defend and promote their livelihoods through learning and action (Lakes, 1994; Fowler and Pratt, 1997; Oakley et al., 1998; Ballantyne, 2002; Cornwall, 2004; Waddington and Mohan, 2004). The pedagogy is hence purposeful in the promotion of practical knowledge and competence in living and being, to equip target groups effectively with not only employability but also critical citizenship, linking them up with employment and empowerment (Lakes, 1994). Such competence, it is suggested, should include at least three foundation skills as follows (Lewis, 2005):

a. basic skills (writing, reading, numeracy, oral language and communication).

b. thinking skills (decision-making, problem-solving, reasoning, critical thinking).

c. personal skills (honesty, self-esteem, responsibility, sociability, self-management).

The integrated pedagogy of VE programmes could express the employment and empowerment of vulnerable people, and have the potential to contribute to the economic gain, personal development and social responsibility of individuals. Given a shift in VE pedagogical content and practices, the next section presents a multiple-case study of nine educational NGOs through which what constitutes an integrated pedagogy of vocational education in urban Cambodia is explored.

3. Cases of NGOs’ intervention in vocational education in Cambodia

In consideration of the economic, educational and socio-cultural vulnerability of young people, a mainly qualitative, multiple-case study is conducted in order to answer the core research question: what constitutes an integrated pedagogy of vocational education for vulnerable young people’s empowerment and employment in urban Cambodia?

Given that the rationale for the selection of cases is to achieve replication logic (Yin, 2003), this qualitative multiple-case study is premised on purposive sampling (Stake, 2000), or what has been called non-probability sampling (Laws et al., 2003). By virtue of replication logic in qualitative inquiry, a multiple-case study, in comparison with a single case study (Yin, 2003) or intrinsic case study (Stake, 2000) may lead to equally abundant insight into a phenomenon, but to better analytic generalisation and thus better theorising. In other words, to select the cases which are representative of the complex characteristics of NGOs in Cambodia is to give not only a sensible flavour of generalisability, but also a higher degree of certainty in theorising. As seen in Table 1, six variables are employed to form the case selection criteria: (1)
registration, (2) size, (3) location, (4) training mode, (5) knowledge and skills portfolio (which involves technical, moral and cultural three aspects), and (6) linkage to employment (which means to facilitate graduate students to get employed). The case selection matrix (Table 1) has thus been formulated in order to help capture the representativeness of the dynamics of these NGOs, whose target groups include vulnerable youths aged 14–30 and whose VE service is a response to labour market needs (Table 2), especially in two growing sectors (i.e. garments and tourism) in urban Cambodia.

Accordingly, nine NGOs located in four cities have been selected to investigate in two three-month periods of fieldwork (i.e. explorative and follow-up periods, during 5 January–25 March 2006 and 10 January–25 March 2007 respectively), where direct observation, participatory observation, documentary collection, semi-structured interview with 38 VE service providers and 69 service beneficiaries were separately applied. Following the data collection, an analytic process with the application of NVivo was developed. The empirical model of an integrated pedagogy of vocational education is built up accordingly, and gain further theoretical verification by comparing it with what VE graduates perceive as constituting the integrated VE pedagogy in the follow-up survey. The findings of pedagogical concepts may at least be triangulated by cross-checking views: (1) among different interviewees (of leading managers, administrative staff, teachers and students); (2) among different NGOs; (3) among different data collection techniques; and even (4) across two different periods of fieldwork.

3.1. Case background

Table 3 indicates the code name of each NGO and interviewee in this multiple-case study. Nine NGOs are separately coded as NGO1, NGO2, NGO3 ... and NGO9, 'L', 'A', 'T' and 'S', respectively, represent four groups of interviewees: leading managers, administrative staff, teaching staff and service beneficiaries. Individual interviewees are identified and coded as 'L01', 'L02', 'A01', 'A02', 'T01', 'T02', 'S01', 'S02', etc. In the following sections, I shall use the code names to refer to the NGOs and interviewees of case study, especially when mentioning them or quoting their words as evidence.

Since NGO1, NGO2, NGO4, NGO5 and NGO8 are all of international identity, they are entailed on different cultures and religious backgrounds. As observed, the organisational effectiveness of these five international NGOs is not just affected by cultural and religious differences but also shaped by their different managerial leaderships. On the other, the actual localising processes of the local NGOs (except for local NGO9) in the case study could be compared and put in order (from the more localised and self-reliant to the less): NGO7, NGO6 and NGO3. Their various degrees of localisation by and large reflect how long these three have been formally transferred to the local identity and registration, and the extent to which they are autonomous in relation to their international support organisations.

3.2. Follow-up evaluation

The objective of the second fieldwork was to examine the relations of the six key pedagogical constituents to the 69 original service beneficiaries' employment and empowerment. To achieve this objective, two data collection techniques were employed. The first was a structured interview (containing a mini questionnaire) to identify correctly any changes that have occurred in the graduates' lives (by collecting 'basic information', e.g. salary, work location, position occupied), and by capturing their perception of their own employment and empowerment after graduation (by asking 11 questions). Copies of a mini questionnaire were distributed to 69 original students, and 67 valid copies were returned. The 69 students were those who had participated in my
semi-structured interviews in the first fieldwork period. They were studying at the NGOs’ VE services in 2006, but had been graduates for six months by the time of the 2007 survey. Thus in statistical terms, the sample size is equivalent to the population in this structured interview.

Notably, although this research is mainly qualitative, there are two reasons for making use of structured interviews (i.e. the mini questionnaire) rather than semi-structured interviews here. The first is to make this research more realistic. Given the previous follow-up experience (when I worked for NGO VE projects during 2000–2001, and 2003–2004), graduate students are rather easier to find and contact at their workplace than at home. The semi-structured interview usually takes longer and therefore is more disruptive when those being interviewed have to work at the same time. There is also less likelihood of creating an open and conversational atmosphere in a work setting for the conduct of a semi-structured interview. The other is to allow the opportunity to gather a great deal of data in a relatively short period, in a properly organised and consistent way.

To further supplement and explain the findings derived from the mini questionnaire, qualitative evidence was gathered by direct observation of the original graduate students’ performance at their workplace. By doing so, the importance of pedagogical constituents from the service users’ perspective could be further identified and scrutinised.

4. Results: a three-tier approach to empowering young people

To most service beneficiaries whom I interviewed, learning in the past was neither job-oriented nor motivational. Students’ experiences also imply that a responsible, cooperative and inclusive environment which discriminates against no-one in the process is most effective for nurturing young people’s performance and personalities. Six pedagogical constituents separately embedded in three different physical learning settings have been found to create such an environment, as shown in Fig. 1. The constituents occur along a space-time matching process, gradually moving from the informal setting (playground), to the formal setting (classroom) and then to the practical venue (workshop) helping students cross the boundary between protection from their NGO and the realities of working life.

4.1. Informal setting: playground

The playground (as in Fig. 1) refers to the outdoor areas or spaces that NGOs provide for students to relax, to take part in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period of fieldwork</th>
<th>NGO1</th>
<th>NGO2</th>
<th>NGO3</th>
<th>NGO4</th>
<th>NGO5</th>
<th>NGO6</th>
<th>NGO7</th>
<th>NGO8</th>
<th>NGO9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leading manager (L)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative staff (A)</td>
<td>A01</td>
<td>A01</td>
<td>A04</td>
<td>A08</td>
<td>A08</td>
<td>A09</td>
<td>A10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching staff (T)</td>
<td>T01</td>
<td>T07</td>
<td>T02</td>
<td>T08</td>
<td>T08</td>
<td>T14</td>
<td>T17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service beneficiaries (S)</td>
<td>S01 to S57</td>
<td>S01 to S57</td>
<td>S08 to S69</td>
<td>S08 to S69</td>
<td>69 (67)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (L, A, T)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (L, A, T, S)</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
games, or to engage in cultural and artistic activities such as drama, dance, drawing and singing. Five out of nine case studies (i.e. NGO1, NGO2, NGO3, NGO4 and NGO6) have some space reserved specifically for students' recreational activities. As shown in Table 4, different but subtle educational thoughts behind playground activities may be observed between NGO3 and the other four NGOs. The boundary between the latter and the community where the organisation is located is open and even blurred. In the playground, vulnerable young people and NGO staff first meet and become familiar with each other. Social workers are appointed to chat and interact with young people there each day, while showing a positive, non-judgmental, accepting and open attitude towards them. By experiencing the friendly and supportive atmosphere that is deliberately made different from that existing in their families and communities, young people eventually are encouraged to move on and to grow relationships based on trust, love, openness and cooperation with NGO staff and their own young peers.

4.1.1. Relationship building

When a good relationship has been generated in the playground, both teaching activities and students' learning performance are found to benefit from it. From the service providers' viewpoint, there is a good match between teaching and relationships. For example, discipline needs to be built upon common agreements reached between teachers and young students, and such agreements will be more effective if a good teacher-student relationship exists. Further, grounded in this good atmosphere that is deliberately made different from that existing in their families and communities, young people eventually are encouraged to move on and to grow relationships based on trust, love, openness and cooperation with NGO staff and their own young peers.

Table 4
Comparison of educational thoughts behind playground activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants of playground activities</th>
<th>NGO1, NGO2, NGO4, NGO6</th>
<th>NGO3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current students and youths from communities</td>
<td>Encouraged</td>
<td>Current students only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundary across NGO and communities</td>
<td>Openness; vague delimitation</td>
<td>Closure; clear delimitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact between foreign staff and students</td>
<td>Encouraged</td>
<td>Forbidden (protecting students from outside dangers and any foreign dominant culture)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact between local staff and students</td>
<td>Encouraged</td>
<td>Encouraged</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The pedagogical design of a playground and its activities may be expected to be a prerequisite for educating students in the VE service. Sports and cultural activities in the playground make a special contribution to the rehabilitation of young people, through which their ability to express, to voice and to reason are developed, their social awareness concerning their livelihood is raised and more importantly, their confidence and self-esteem are encouraged. Rehabilitation thus means to restore and encourage students' psychosocial development for self-expression, self-esteem and confidence, as the foundation for their becoming effective learners at NGO VE services and afterwards, agents of social change.

4.2. Formal setting: classroom

Two components underpinning formal curricular modules in the formal learning setting have been found crucial in motivating students to learn effectively: one is 'know-how acquisition' and the other is 'moral involvement', as can be seen in Fig. 1.

4.2.1. Know-how acquisition

Gaining skills and technical knowledge is called 'know-how acquisition' here, because many service providers in the case studies emphasise the students' capacity for 'knowing how to do that' rather than 'knowing how to state that'. The former particularly refers to the physical and practical (and more or less, theoretical) understanding of relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes. All NGOs in this case study show their awareness of labour market demands in Cambodia (Table 2), and their methods of responding by teaching the relevant skills are apparent. L04 in NGO1 first argues that the course design should be 'very practical'. Accordingly, part-time courses in NGO2 are provided in a flexible way, in order to reduce the opportunity cost of students' participation in the VE service. In another case, NGO3, the modular courses are taught in a hands-on and participatory way; they are both practical and feasible. The time allotment in the nine NGOs' curricula thus varies from a part-time, six-month mode (in NGO2, NGO3, NGO4 and NGO6), to two-year, full-time (in NGO1, NGO3, NGO4 and NGO7), and to traditional apprenticeship (in NGO3, NGO5 and NGO6).

The flexibility of course design is also reliant upon innovation. NGO3, for instance, had the innovative idea of setting up mobile classes in both sewing and motorbike repair in each village around the border town of Poipet, employing teachers who themselves come from those villages. This programme has attracted many impoverished learners, since the classes are brought closer to those living at a distance from Poipet. Most of those people could not afford to travel to the town where the majority of NGOs operating in the area are based. It has been found that local NGOs more than international NGOs draw upon the community as an important source of social capital, and local knowledge to re-energise NGO VE services and to improve its pedagogy, i.e. to make VE services context-appropriate.

4.2.2. Moral involvement

Many service beneficiaries describe a feeling that their knowledge acquisition is in fact inseparable from their moral
However, from the teachers’ and students’ point of view at NGO1, seen as a positive, useful attribute for their future employment.

nine cases (except for NGO4 and NGO8, as shown in Table 6) workshops give students the real opportunity to cross the boundaries between classroom, workshop and living place. The other component of workshop practices is ‘consultative provision’. NGOs provide technical advice and follow-up service to enable students to take advantage of the values of work, i.e., to learn that work is not only a process of productivity, but also a process of socialisation. Students are encouraged to solve problems, cope with challenges and critically analyse issues and relationships encountered at work. In short, it is ‘grow-while-you-work’. After graduation, consultative activities are likely to be reduced but they do take place, in the form of monthly graduate meeting or through regular monitoring. The contact and consultation with graduate students may in turn enrich the teaching materials and pedagogical ideas of service providers, and help to re-design or re-shape courses.

4.3. Boundary-crossing venue: workshop

Workshop (as indicated in Fig. 1), to use the pedagogical term, is accepted as being on-the-job training or apprenticeship. Other than merely simulating what business is like in the classroom, workshops give students the real opportunity to cross the boundary between the classroom and the workplace, and to gather work experience in the real business world. Seven out of the nine cases (except for NGO4 and NGO8, as shown in Table 6) organise on-the-job training for their current students. While the location and duration of on-the-job training are a matter of debate among NGOs, two constituents for composing a workshop are generally agreed to be essential by the VE service providers.

4.3.1. Incentive provision

One is ‘incentive provision’. This means to provide current needy students with opportunities for income generation, in order to motivate their learning performance, deter them from dropping-out, and offset the high opportunity costs of learning at NGO VE services. In short, it is ‘earn-while-you-learn’. The idea was given special emphasis by the service providers in Poipet, which is the poorest town in this study.

NGO9 in NGO9 further explains why incentives are so important to young people. The reasons could be expressed in terms of the psychological, cultural and social aspects of life. Psychologically, as long as youngsters do not need to beg for money, their confidence and self-esteem will not suffer any further damage. Culturally, they are expected by their family members to bring some money home; a small income can meet their familial expectations and economic requirements. Socially, earning money helps young individuals to deal more confidently with social life. They need money to support their social relationships and sometimes, to be able to buy stationery, snacks or things that might not be apparent to their adult relatives or the NGO staff.

4.3.2. Consultative provision

The other component of workshop practices is ‘consultative provision’. NGOs provide technical advice and follow-up service to enable students to take advantage of the values of work, i.e., to learn that work is not only a process of productivity, but also a process of socialisation. Students are encouraged to solve problems, cope with challenges and critically analyse issues and relationships encountered at work. In short, it is ‘grow-while-you-work’. After graduation, consultative activities are likely to be reduced but they do take place, in the form of monthly graduate meeting or through regular monitoring. The contact and consultation with graduate students may in turn enrich the teaching materials and pedagogical ideas of service providers, and help to re-design or re-shape courses.

NGO9 argues that the VE service should not only provide work for the immediate purpose of employment, but also for students’ psychological development. As exemplified in the design of the cooking courses in NGO3, NGO5 and NGO9, the water purification plant in NGO6 and the car repair shop in NGO7, students and teachers there are in fact living, learning and working together. The boundaries between classroom, workshop and living place are

Table 5
Comparison of fostering morality in different classrooms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classrooms of:</th>
<th>NGO1, NGO2, NGO3, NGO4</th>
<th>NGO5, NGO6, NGO7, NGO8, NGO9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What to convey:</td>
<td>Christian values (such as love, forgiveness, and sacrifice for others) and Khmer culture</td>
<td>‘Universal principles’ (e.g. UN conventions) and Khmer culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why to convey:</td>
<td>Prevention of frustration and encouragement to take social responsibility; making sense of real-life issues and situations; for “whole person” (said by L10); for “good persons in the world” (said by L09).</td>
<td>As employable disposition; for reintegration into society; for “well-being” (said by L09); making sense of real-life issues and situations; for “independent thinker” (said by L09).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to convey:</td>
<td>Regular moral course as part of formal curriculum</td>
<td>Artistic or cultural therapy in the forms of short-term workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign providers’ self-perception</td>
<td>Insider (Lifelong commitment in locality)</td>
<td>Outsider (‘The whole point is, we’re setting it up and moving on,” as said by L09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controversies (i.e. space for negotiation)</td>
<td>Religious belief exists in the name of universal principles (e.g. is Christian ‘moral/value education’ ethical in Cambodia?)</td>
<td>Cultural bias exists in the name of universal principles (e.g., whose ethical or aesthetical values are conveyed? Can the UN values be counted as ‘universal’?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6
NGOs’ provision of workshops by developing own business and institutional linkages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provision of workshops, by developing</th>
<th>Own business</th>
<th>Institutional linkages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NGO1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO3</td>
<td>✓ (restaurant)</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO4</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO5</td>
<td>✓ (restaurant)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO6</td>
<td>✓ (water purifier)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO7</td>
<td>✓ (car repair)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO8</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO9</td>
<td>✓ (restaurant)</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: In these cases of improving students’ commercial experience, the symbol ✓ indicates that NGOs have developed own business or/and linkages with other institutions for students’ on-the-job training.
rather blurred in this real-life situation. In addition to group counselling and consultation having been formally introduced into these VE forms of apprenticeship, most VE service providers agree that the apprenticeship (and its likelihood) helps their students seek more individual consultative experiences. Apprentices will take advantage of their involvement in the business environment, the opportunity to encounter relevant enterprise relationships and other, more subtle, real-life issues. As illustrated in Fig. 1, most of the NGOs in my study have created an inclusive and caring environment where individual VE students could develop their own personality and skills. To create such an environment, a three-tier, context-appropriate approach of VE pedagogy (comprising the six pedagogical constituents, separately embedded in three different physical learning settings, i.e., playground, classroom and workshop) have shed light upon an integrative, holistic view of vocational education, and have proved the view to be both feasible and reliable.

5. Discussion: response to skills needs of vulnerable young Cambodians

Clearly, poor people in developing countries as a whole are still excluded from the major routes into vocational education and training, apart from some who find affordable access to NGOs’ non-profit, or precisely, not-for-profit) VE services (King and Palmer, 2007). In Cambodia, just 0.7% of the country’s labour force comes from publicly-provided VE institutes (ILO, 2002; Mahmood, 2005) which are financially out of reach to the majority of vulnerable young Cambodians. Yet, as indicated in Section 4, VE pedagogy may be delivered in a more equitable way, if many socio-economic roles that young people have to manage, such as care responsibilities and economic necessity for their families and community, are considered by VE pedagogy and simultaneously, a healing and caring process that addresses self-esteem and personality development is included. Moreover, VE pedagogical practices at the micro level will have a more positive effect on students’ employment and empowerment if the pedagogy is context-appropriate (Watson, 1994; Powell, 2006), and functions as a micro reaction to the Cambodian macro reality where new skills requirements are emerging and the skills gap between demand and supply in the country’s labour market is widening, particularly in the garment and tourist industries (ADB, 2008). From the micro perspective, the focus of integrated VE pedagogy in this study is on addressing the needs of the vulnerable young people, equipping them with core tangible and intangible skills in the hope of transforming their economic and social situation in the specific Cambodian urban context. Therefore, the discussion over how to deliver the knowledge and skills in need, and what knowledge and skills to deliver will be put forward respectively in Sections 5.1 and 5.2.

5.1. Pedagogical argument versus economic argument

How to respond to the skills needs of the vulnerable young people in urban Cambodia? When Schumacher (1993) spoke in London about the problem of unemployment in the developing world, he suggested four preconditions for aid groups before they started any concrete intervention: firstly, motivation; then, skills and knowledge; thirdly capital, and finally a new demand or market. So far I have found new demands in the garment industry (ADB, 2006; World Bank, 2007a) as well as tourism (in Section 1), NGOs as an intermediary for transferring resources (in Section 3) and relevant knowledge and skills to convey (in Sections 2 and 4). What is missing in the majority of previous relevant studies, but in fact needs to come in first place, is motivation. The convergence of resources, knowledge dissemination and a new market needs to be triggered by motivation, and motivation is most likely to be galvanised by pedagogical relevance and quality. The pedagogical constituents ‘Relationship Development’ and ‘Rehabilitation’ found in Section 4.1 are in particular the keys to motivating Cambodia’s traumatised young people from the outset. The latter, in turns, needs to be reinforced and sustained by other four pedagogical constituents in Sections 4.2 and 4.3 throughout the whole learning process.

Nevertheless, as confirmed by the most service beneficiaries whom I interviewed in the case study, their learning experience outside the NGO VE programmes was neither job-oriented nor motivational (as already mentioned in the beginning of Section 4). Motivation of vulnerable young people at the outset of VE programmes are often overlooked in many international donors’ policies and publications, as in the work of the World Bank (Middleton et al., 1993; Lauglo et al., 2002; World Bank, 2003), ILO (Corvalan, 1984; Grierson and McKenzie, 1996; ILO, 2000; Riordan, 2007) and UNESCO (Caillods, 1989; Leonardos, 1999; Bernard, 2002; Singh, 2002). These three multi-lateral donor agencies have been the most influential in shaping Cambodia’s policies on vocational training and education. Many of their suggestions and guidelines remain based on economic rather than pedagogical arguments (Watson, 1994), and as a result lead VE practices to promote the direct relation between skills and competitiveness in the macro national (and very often, global) economy. The question is therefore: is integrated VE pedagogy purposed to respond to either skills needs of the vulnerable young individuals, or the skills needs of the market in Cambodia? Having borne this in mind, my empirical evidence argues that the direct link between skills and employment is necessary but by no means sufficient for the youth to cope with their economic, educational and socio-cultural vulnerability stated in Section 1. Rather, as stressed by the leading manager L08 in NGO3, ‘empowerment is the main objective of vocational training and education’, so the latter is able to react to socio-economic inequality occurring in the Cambodian post-conflict reality which has been made worse by the country’s collective trauma, poor human and social capital and increased corruption. There exists a differentiation between ‘training humans’ with ‘training puppets’ (said by L08), and between ‘vocational education’ with its narrow term ‘vocational training’. To be precise, VE service as an attempt to manage a support system for learning is obviously not a ‘one size fits all’ model, but is tailored to learners’ diverse needs and specific situations. Education integrated with social work is operated in a real business environment, where the six key pedagogical constituents in Section 4 must find a place to take care of VE students’ economic, social and psychological needs from the beginning and throughout the whole of their VE activities.

5.2. Knowledge and skills for employment and empowerment

Historic divisions in delivering academic and vocational knowledge seem no longer appropriate in Cambodia. Market simulation (i.e. learning in classrooms, as analysed in Section 4.2) also needs to be supplemented by the market itself (i.e. learning in workplaces, as elaborated in Section 4.3), where VE students can be exposed to the ideas of business and those competencies relevant to a specific enterprise, and can build up personal enterprise networks (Grierson, 1997; McGrath et al., 1995). So, what skills are required by the two fast-growing sectors in Cambodia, i.e. tourism and the garment industry (ADB, 2006; World Bank, 2007a)? Besides relevant tourist and business skills (especially cooking and hospitality skills, transport, handicrafts, English language and communication) (Prachvuthy, 2006), my case studies also point out that both tangible skills and intangible skills are equally critical to the tourism industry. In addition to being ready for employment with tangible skills, VE graduate students with intangible
knowledge and attitudes (such as good values and a positive disposition) are found to please employers in the Cambodian economy where social relationship, personal links and trust have substituted for missing institutions (Murshid and Sokphally, 2005).

In terms of the garment industry, the industry in Cambodia, on the other side, will continue to play a less profitable, outsourcing and downstream role in the global value chain if the importance of what skills to deliver is not re-addressed in order to fill the skill gap currently found (EIC, 2006). Cambodian young people are expected to encourage them to be economically independent and become successful entrepreneurs in skiing, from the beginning and throughout the whole of their VE activities, and to let power emerge spontaneously on their side in a cooperative and inclusive environment. To determine role to convince VE students and stimulate their motivation to acquire more advanced knowledge (Leonardos, 1999; Ravasco, 2006).

6. Conclusion

On the whole, I conclude that the growth of the Cambodian garment industry and tourism may improve the employment and empowerment of impoverished urban young people. This can be made possible if pedagogy is tailor-made to match education with the demands of the labour market, supporting the process of students’ empowerment. The findings show that a cooperative and inclusive environment for learning and living is most effective in nurturing young people’s learning and personal development, and to encourage them to be economically independent and become agents of social change. The overall educational idea is to provide opportunities to practice power, to ensure vulnerable young people’s empowerment process—especially participating and experiencing, from the beginning and throughout the whole of their VE activities, and to let power emerge spontaneously on their side in a cooperative and inclusive environment. To create such an environment, a three-tier, context-appropriate approach of VE pedagogy (comprising the six constituents, separately embedded in three different physical learning settings, i.e. playground, classroom and workshop) have shed light upon an integrative, holistic view of vocational education, and have proved the view to be both feasible and reliable.

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