

Original Paper

Images of School from a Cambodian Rural Community: The Nexus of Memory and Present

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Abstract

Few qualitative studies have been done in Cambodia, a country held hostage by the murderous Khmer Rouge in the 1970s. As it recovers from these atrocities, Cambodia looks to education to aid in its redevelopment.

This ethnographically-informed case study describes the educational understandings and oral history of residents of a rural Cambodian village. By listening to the voices of those who lived through the Khmer Rouge era and those who grew up in its shadow, we can better understand the foundations of education in rural Cambodia. The research describes ways in which literacy is exhibited in this village, revealing the possibilities of rich alternate literacies and strong beliefs in the future of education.

Using both Paulo Freire's work and a feminist lens as suggested by Sara Lawrence- Lightfoot, field work was conducted in Cambodia using a variety of data sources: observations, interviews, and casual conversations. Analysing these data using the Portraiture Approach resulted in a complex picture of life within the village and ways literacy is shared. Findings from this case study reveal a rich foundation on which to build literacy within Cambodian by tending to the expressed and observed local needs.

Keywords

Cambodia, rural Cambodian educational attitudes, rural Cambodian educational beliefs, description of rural Cambodian education, portraiture

1. Introduction

The clanging sound of the what served as a bell split the intensely humid air, serving as a reminder that this rural community was not as sleepily tranquil in the morning hours as appeared. As I said, “*Chom reap lear*”, to the tuk-tuk driver and bounced through the thick air with excitement, I spied the sight I loved so dearly: a small child, wide-eyed with a toothy grin hitting the bombshell with a rock, calling his friends to school. As an American, the sight of that spent bombshell never ceased to cut through me

deeply, for it was one my country pelted the Cambodian countryside with during the United States “secret bombing” during the Vietnam war era. I admired the spirit of rural villagers who dug up these instruments of death and recycled them into the hopeful call to education. It was into this world that I stepped to better understand the role of the rural community’s support for their local school, a unique study for this country and setting.

1.1 Historical Context: The Killing Fields and the Code Word “School”

The Pol Pot Regime. This Cambodian time period has many names ranging from the dreaded *Angkar* (meaning organization) to that which is familiar in the Western mind, the Khmer Rouge. Members of the educated class were systematically hunted down and killed between 1975 and 1979. Children witnessed the execution of fellow villagers. An estimated 1.7 million people disappeared (Mydans, 2007). The leader of the slaughter, Pol Pot survived until 1998. Questions still linger as to why he and his followers turned the country into a virtual concentration camp. Alexander Hinton’s book title poses this question: *Why Did They Kill?* (2005).

What is clear are the tactics the Khmer Rouge used. People were assigned to endless work brigades. Men, women, and children laboured in the rice fields from sun up to sun down. As the months passed, the Khmer Rouge separated families. Children as young as six were routinely taken away from parents and forced to work in children’s brigades clearing land or planting rice seedlings (Becker, 1998). This separation of the family was contrary to the kinship that epitomized the family fabric of Cambodian culture and contributed to the growing despair in the country. Ben Kiernan (2002) tells the story of a father, Sum, whose four children, ages eight through fifteen were sent to the work brigades. Sum only saw his children every few months (p. 182). This was the Communists’ plan: destroy the familial, social fabric of the country so that all were dependent on the Party. “Family life had to be eliminated” (Becker, 1998, p. 211).

Does the memory of this horrific time influence present-day Cambodian villages? Are families still impacted by the coding of education as killing fields? Today’s grandparents were the young women and men of 1975. Those that survived have powerful memories of their personal struggles. Do these memories negatively influence the way this generation and their offspring look at local education? Do their families retain any fear of education? Is there a commitment to literacy education? These were questions as I set foot into a hidden Cambodian village to discover the answers to my questions.

2. Delving into the Literature: The Mesosystem of the Community’s Role in Primary Education

Looking closely at the role of the mesosystem of the community is a necessary component of any research in Cambodia. The importance of the local village is well documented in the research on schools in developing nations. Yang Rui’s (1995) qualitative study reports on the success of schools in the Pearl River Delta area of China. He attributes this success to local control and notes, “After 14 years of opening and reforming, people in the Pearl River Delta realize that education is a kind of investment” (p. 25). He calls for local control of Chinese schools to address the unique needs of various

regions.

In an overview of East Timor's preschool program, it was concluded that schools in developing nations are successful when the local community is involved (Palmer & Pires, 2005). By working collaboratively, community leaders and members built and maintained preschools. In particular, the study authors noted the importance of flexibility and concern for local needs when designing and implementing the curriculum.

The intense involvement of a local community in central rural India helped to ensure the success of the preschool (Gokale, 2005). In this descriptive study, replete with results based on researcher observations and interviews with participants, it was reported that a 15-member committee, elected by the community, oversaw the school and met with teachers and parents. The community was intimately involved in the curriculum and participated in celebrations and festivals. The study concludes that the strong cultural aspects of the school such as storytelling and singing likely had a positive impact on developing literacy.

In a reform movement in Thailand designed to include Thai communities in a whole-school change that focused on becoming less teacher-centered and more learner-centered, an important component was to involve parents and the community in a variety of ways including requesting help from local villagers to teach and/or demonstrate aspects of traditional culture (Khemmani, 2006). Community members were included in the curricular planning process and encouraged to attend school events.

An underlying question for rural teachers, particularly in the Koh Kong province in Cambodia, where those without an education survived the murderous Pol Pot regime because of the lack of such, is will rural Cambodians, who still have a memory of these events, support the efforts of teachers who seek to establish and maintain schools? The apparent lack of such research is an omission in the literature that needs to be addressed, in part, by this study.

The lack of knowledge regarding how the community feels, encourages, and develops this sense of hope is one that needs to be better understood. Thus, this research helps to fill this gap.

2.1 The Lens: Stepping into the Research

As a white woman from the United States I was aware of my status as an outsider in rural Cambodia. While this is a consideration, other researchers have struggled with this dilemma. For example, Seaton (2007) describes her concern that as a white woman from an Ivy League Institution interviewing community members in New Hampshire, she could be perceived an outsider despite her personal experiences growing up and working in rural areas. She notes that while the role of an outsider can result in serious questions, there are benefits such as the ability to reveal practices and beliefs that community members take for granted. She reminds researchers of the necessity to build relationships, which is why I visited this area several times before interviewing participants.

This relationship-building is something Freire (2000) describes. He reminds us of the necessity of including village participants and teachers in the process of understanding; thus, as a researcher it is important for me to walk on the sandy trail as it winds through the village, to shop in the local market,

and to eat meals in homes. Moreover, according to Freire it is essential to present only “pictures of reality” that are familiar to the participants. A researcher, such as myself, who uses Freire’s principles works in concert with the local community and brings interpretations, questions, and problems to those who live these circumstances day in and day out. Therefore, following this relationship-building model, I needed to “be” in the midst of the village. I thought of members of the community as my “co-investigators” and constantly looked to them to identify themes and meaning (Freire, 2007).

2.2 Portraiture: “The People’s Scholarship”

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) encourage the writer to consider a broader audience than merely the “academy”. With the Portraiture Approach, the researcher writes for a wide audience; she writes so that the larger community will understand her findings. Portraiture has been called “a people’s scholarship” (p. 10). As “people’s scholarship, interview questions for villagers depended on what I observed. This was a way to further develop relationship in that moment. For example, if pictures were displayed, I often asked about these as a means to better understand literacy in the home. If children were present, I talked about their experiences in school. While the wording of questions varied, my goals were to discover villager attitudes about the school and feelings toward education. These are the facets of observation that Lawrence-Light and Davis argue result in a rich portrait of the participant’s full experience.

I returned to my home with a collection of photographs and videos. These helped me recapture the feel of the countryside, sounds, and richness of the environment. I transcribed the interviews, looking for relevant shared experiences about education. While interesting and often used as descriptors, statements about baby chickens and the day’s weather may have been omitted from my portraits. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis describe, these remembrances result in richer understandings. When writing my final portrait, I often returned to slideshows to both put myself in the picture and to view the scene from a different perch. As is fitting, Portraiture became the methodology for this study.

2.3 Writing the Portrait

Words of participants are freely used in the portrait. Staying true to the form of Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’s (1997) Portraiture, I, of course, cite sources that are published but do not cite with the “personal conversation” notation the ideas shared by those I interviewed.

Minute details, descriptive adjectives, metaphor, and symbolism are essential. These researchers encourage the use of such rhetorical devices to report results and to help the reader understand the totality of life. As such, the realities of life in a rural Cambodian school are bathed in the metaphors of the Cambodian village. Portraiture is a way to tell the story, the story of the rural village. The stories allow us to look through the historical lens at the educational views of four different village families.

2.4 Village Portrait Album

This Cambodian Village Portrait Album contains a collage of the four families who sat with me to share their lives, views on education and literacy, and their hopes for their children. These people were a sample of convenience. They happened to be home when we passed by their house. When my translator

introduced me, they readily agreed to talk with me and even for me to record them. No one refused.

2.5 The Weaving Grandmother

On the same side of the road as the school, nestled under the overhanging fruit and leafy trees, sits a tiny home that can barely be seen from the path. Here a toothless older woman sat, legs folded underneath her, in front of her two-room, dark residence where gaps in the boards allowed what little sun there was on this side of the village into the furniture-free areas. One room holds sleeping mats and the other has a wooden platform for sitting or eating. Most living seemed to take place on the outside of this home. Pots and pans hang on the porch-like area where the grandmother strips her pile of rattan in preparation for weaving.

This woman talks of her wishes for her young grandson who stands near-by with a cadre of friends. She tells me that the boy's father, her son, was "always escaping from school" but she knows her grandson is different and that he stays and "does not escape". She speaks highly of her support for the school but when I ask her if she had recently visited the school she shakes her head and says, "No I am too busy here". She says she admires the work of the faculty and hopes her grandson will be a teacher or doctor. But she says she cannot help him as she cannot read or write well enough, and she must work constantly so that the family can buy food and clothing. There is no time for anything else.

She describes her struggle to get enough plant material for weaving and clucks her tongue about the dispute with Thailand. She launches into a long statement about the problem and ends by concluding that this is troublesome for the village, as baskets cannot be sold to the dwindling number of tourists in the disputed area, creating further limitations to the already strained income stream of the villagers.

A few village boys attend high school in the near-by town and because of them and some men who are able to occasionally use an Internet Café to read news, global events are freely shared in the village. This is a form of literacy that harkens back in time to the days of the village criers in the U.S. The grandmother tells me she is happy these males can read and will share news with others, who in turn tell neighbours and friends of events. This is an illustration of oral communication on the village level. As if to demonstrate the usefulness of this oral literacy, the "weaving grandmother" tells me about the U.S. president, at that time Barack Obama. She describes his skin colour and his ears, but additionally phrases such as "friendships" are used.

When I ask this woman about other sources of news such as newspapers or magazines she says they do not have any in the house and that she would not be able to read them anyway. Without looking up from her stripping task, this grandmother nods toward a burnt science and social studies schoolbook the child had brought home from the morning session. Because the bottom half of the pages are curled with the remnants of an accidental burning, it would be impossible to read the totality of text. She tells me that the child's father, her son, put the book too close to the fire. She continues by saying there are no books in the house and that her grandson never brings home a library book, only a schoolbook. She says he cannot read or write the Khmer Language yet as he is only in the second grade. I confirm the absence of calendars and other alternative literacy sources as the woman talks again of her support for

the school and its teachers and of her hope that her grandson along with the other boys, who peek around the corner of the house, will be educated. This woman is of the generation of people who lived through the Khmer Rouge. She does not equate education with the negative. She embraces it.

During our conversation, this woman never stopped stripping her rattan. Her head remained focused on her task, her fingers moving in the deft rhythm of her stripping task as she answered my questions and then lectured about the difficulties of finding her needed material. Just as the teachers struggle with lack of supplies, here provisions are also a problem.

2.5.1 The Sad Woman

Further down the path, in a dark area under large trees is the home of a struggling young wife and mother. As we approach she grabs an oversized shirt from a basket of crumbled, faded clothing and slips it over her naked daughter's head. The girl, about two years old, never leaves her mother's side during my visit. She stares at me with her big eyes, and I am never able to coax a smile onto her expressionless face. This woman seems to carry a heavy burden. Her face droops with exhaustion. She speaks in a monotone, focusing on the need for her daughter to fold her legs so I cannot see the bottoms of her feet, which is disrespectful in this and many other Asian cultures. This woman's home lacks the friendly family-oriented lustre of others I've visited. It is not merely simple; it is in disrepair. Garbage is piled all around. Old cooking pots are scattered. The boards of the home show wide gaps. She tells me that life is hard as her husband lost a leg in a landmine accident, and she has no education. She must depend on basket weaving to support her family but now it is difficult as she only receives one dollar for forty baskets.

I look around and see no reading or writing material anywhere in the home. She does not display, as so many young mothers do, any torn pages from the popular Cambodian fashion magazines. There is nothing here at all.

The woman is polite and seems happy to have visitors. She invites me to sit but not before she has brushed off a rickety wooden bench for me. This young mother's eyes cry out despair as she tells me about the problems her son has in school. She says she has been called many times to his classroom because this second grader does not speak. She says he has urinated on the classroom floor and refuses to ask permission to leave the room. She believes the teacher is very kind and wants to help but has no idea how to assist this boy. The young mother sighs, giving me the feeling she is desperately seeking answers. She continues her pleading description of this problem by telling of going to the classroom and peeking through the open window to observe her son. This just confirms what the teacher has said and what she already knows to be true. He does not speak in class.

She never calls her child by name and tells me "the boy" sometimes whisper reads his homework while lying on his mat at night; but her husband, who can read, says he is not saying the words correctly. She wipes the air with her hand and offers the conclusion that she worries what he will do as he grows. There is no "dream" talk here or hope for this child. She seems resigned to his fate of illiteracy.

But this changes when she turns to her daughter and strokes her hair. She speaks with the first hint of

hope I have heard since sitting with her, speaking of her wish that at least this child will be able to read and write. She says she hopes this child will “say the words in the class”. I had been conditioned to believe that education for girls was not always valued in developing countries. But this woman, like so many others, has literacy dreams for her daughter.

I ask this mother if, given the opportunity, she would like to share fashion magazines with her neighbours. It is a practice I learned about from another villager. I wonder if she would enjoy looking at the pictures as I know seeing her mother holding reading material would be an important model for the little girl. But this mother seems uninterested and barely replies to my question other than to shrug her shoulders and stroke her daughter’s hair. I inquire as to her interest in attending evening classes at the school if these were ever offered, but again she seems nonchalant and says she must work and take care of her family.

As we talked, the sound of chickens was all around. I felt little feet racing over and around my feet as they circled the area in a constant scurry to nowhere. Chickens of all sizes overran the house area to the point where I nearly stepped on a bird that couldn’t have been more than a few days old. I had to constantly look at my flip-flops to be sure I didn’t move them in the wrong direction and accidentally step on a chick. This interview time was a banquet for my senses: the remembrance of the feel and sight of that chicken carpet and the sound of the pernicious pecking. But as in all homes on this side of the road, it was the intense smell and taste of the wood fire that I still feel when I resurrect these memories.

As I got up to leave, I noticed this woman eyeing my camera. I ask if she would like to have her picture taken. She nods excitedly and carefully places the little girl on her lap. I take a digital photo and show it to her. She is filled with delight. I was pleased to see the joy this simple pleasure brought to her and explained that I could take a short video of her and the girl. She asks for me to be a part of the little movie so my translator obliges and holds the camera in front of us as we sit still, not really knowing what to do for this video; but we laugh as we watch the resulting images on the small screen of my camera. She thanks me over and over again. I left feeling relieved that I could bring this small joy into her life.

2.5.2 The Husband and Wife with Strong Educational Beliefs

The other part of this village is a patchwork of open rice fields and farms where eggplant and string beans are grown. A few concrete two-story houses are interspersed with palm thatched wooden huts and stilted homes. One of these boarded homes displays an open shed filled with mounds of woven baskets and bags. I learn that the man who lives here brings these handicrafts to the border for sale but because of a dispute, he can no longer sell them at this location. He now works on a near-by construction project. When we visit this family of four, the man has just returned home from his labours and is caked with mud, but he welcomes us and sends his young son off in search of bottled water, a rarity in most of these homes that depend on a hand well or small ponds for this necessity. His wife searches for a cloth to wipe the outdoor table. Her attire is a common sight in Cambodia.

As we settle in at the table, the second-grade boy tells me that he remembers my visit last year and mentions that he is happy I have returned. He can even sing a few bars of the colour song I often sing with groups of children which he entices me to join him in, much to the delight of his parents. I am surprised he remembers this.

The father says he speaks to other men about this and sees pictures in newspapers that some bring to the construction site. He is also able to watch some news on the family's television set, which receives limited programming such as Cambodian music and dancing. Thinking of the words on a karaoke machine, I ask about text being offered on the screen as singers are performing, but the two adults shake their heads and say this is not offered. I look at the children and ask if any children's shows are available but am again answered with a shake of the head.

During this discussion, the man asks me where I am from and when he hears "the United States", he begins to tell me about President Obama. I can't discern if he is anxious to show me all he knows or if he thinks I am unaware of the U.S. leader's characteristics. President Obama's skin colour is emphasized to me as are the size of his ears and short hair. The man tells me that he and others are very happy that Barack Obama is the president. During this key chit-chat introduction, I have learned valuable information about literacy. This family is interested in and has access to news of world events. Political discussion over, the mother tells me that her daughter can already read and write a few words of Khmer. She helps the child at night, often using the books that her son carries home from the school. She shakes her head when I ask if he reads library books saying, "He has read them all".

I ask about her literacy practices and she describes an informal practice of sharing magazines. I term this an "informal lending library" as the periodicals are passed from woman to woman on this side of the road. The woman has no idea where these magazines come from, but she reports that she is happy to receive one and always passes it to a neighbour when she is finished. These are magazines containing photos and descriptions of fashion trends along with ideas about recipes. Sometimes she may even find a magazine with articles about children's health. She says she enjoys reading these stories.

When I inquire about this couple's education I am told they each graduated from eighth grade, an accomplishment when they were of school age. The father tells me that he attended the Apsara School when he was a child. He tells me that this school had a coconut [leaf] roof and few rooms when he attended. The wife went to a school in a near-by village in a similar kind of school. When I ask them to compare the difference in the education they received and the experiences of their son, I am impressed with the complete description this couple is able to provide. They begin by talking about the lack of books when they were students. All they had was "one writing notebook". There were no textbooks and teachers merely told the class about different subjects and hoped the students would write this information in their composition books. They feel that not only are there textbooks now but that the teachers use a greater variety of teaching techniques. There is not as much lecture by the teacher. Blackboards and whiteboards allow teachers and students to write sentences and math problems for all

to see. Some teachers ask children to write on slates so that all students must work at the same time rather than waiting for their turn, a practice I have observed in the school. Children can read books orally and bring them home. Teachers even try to use examples from the village to help students understand.

The couple has great hope for the future of their children and others in the village. They want their son and daughter to do something to help the Cambodian people and talk of the many issues in the country such as poverty, health, and clean water. It is their hope that the children who are being educated now at the village school will be a source of pride for the village and will assist in solving the difficulties the country faces. There was hope that all children would succeed in making Cambodia a more developed country.

This family, with a comparatively rich background in education, appeared to be passionate about education. The conversation gave me a first-hand account of what the village school was like for a student about fifteen years ago. The family also had some interesting literacy habits that I had not encountered prior to meeting them. The richness of the women's lending library and of the man's information from formal literacy, the newspapers, and informal literacy, conversations with fellow workers, were helpful answers to my questions regarding literacy practices in the village. Additionally, they were the first villagers I spoke with who owned a television.

As I left, they presented me with several baskets from their home. Now, when I look at them and finger the tightly woven reeds that together form this perfect treasure, the memories of the close interactions of this village come flooding back to me. My eyes often follow an individual reed and I think of the individuals who together share and work in harmony. They are all connected, like a tapestry.

This husband and wife were so anxious to help me learn more about their beloved village that they asked their young son to guide us to another home. He smiled broadly, sang a few bars of my colour song, and motioned us along. We were on our way.

2.5.3 The Woman Who Displayed Fashion Pictures

This little boy eagerly skipped in front of us as we walked along the dusty, pot-holed path past a pig farm, sidestepping a wandering rooster, and avoiding a dog with a curled tail that joined our single file line. The boy motioned us to move along the narrowing trail as it framed a bright green rice field, and then he pointed a few feet ahead to a tiny board hut with a single opening that served as a door. On one side of the palm-thatched home was an outhouse whose door hung precariously on a hinge revealing the squat hole and a bevy of insects enjoying the contents. In a three-sided tiny building on the other side of the hut sat two small girls balancing plastic bowls on their laps as they scooped rice with their hands into their mouths. The two sat on either side of a wood fire, which was the heating source for the metal pot of rice. I inwardly gasped as no adult seemed to be around to watch these two pre-schoolers who sat too near the burning flame for my taste. The boy said he would find their mother. He raced down the path. I peeked through the opening into the one room hut and saw a sewing machine operated by a foot pedal and about fifteen pictures of lovely Cambodian women modelling colourful clothes. My

assumption that this mother was a seamstress was later confirmed during my conversation with her. I walked around the house, keeping my eye on the little girls who never stopped eating and barely acknowledged my presence. Water pooled in a stagnant brown canal on one side of the house. The lack of water bottles made me suspect that this family depends on the muddy water.

In a few minutes the mother rides up on a big rusty bicycle, smiling broadly. The girls do not move as she leans her bike against the house and grabs a rag to wipe the outdoor platform off for us to use as we talk. She says she is happy to have guests and had been visiting at a neighbour's home when we arrived. I ask about her pictures which people have given her from fashion magazines. But when I ask about reading these magazines, she giggles and says she really doesn't read well despite attending school for many years. She says that she does not encourage her son to take out books from the library. She wants him to "do the work the teacher wants him to do". She seems to view literacy as only happening within the walls of the classroom with the government-issued textbooks.

Without being prompted, this mother launches into a long soliloquy about the importance of education. She describes her lectures to her children about the necessity of listening to the teachers and always doing what is asked of them in school. She has a son who is attending school now. She details how she sits with him, on this platform under the single fluorescent bulb, which is powered by a battery, so that he does his homework. She says she really can't help him much, but she sits by him so that he will do it. She thinks this is important. She intends to do the same thing when her daughters reach school age. Her words then become less specific and take on a generalized "hope for the future" tone. She wants her children to be doctors or teachers so "they can help the people of my country". She knows this is a poor nation with many needs and wants her son and daughters to join the other children in the area to "make a better future".

This sentiment is in keeping with the hopes I have heard from other villagers. It is these people and others like them who send their precious off-spring to school, putting in the teachers' hands their dreams for not just their children's success, but the desire that the country will have a better future because of what she is able to accomplish. Parents here, and in other areas of Cambodia I have visited, often speak not just about their individual children as having a responsibility to bring the country from despair to hope but they see all children as holding the key to a brighter future. There was no talk about keeping children home to work the fields or to provide day-care for younger siblings. Instead their words support education and the local school. They want opportunities for reading and writing. But they struggle. Newspapers and magazines are expensive relative to their income, especially with the economic downturn. Yet, these are seeds of rich literacy. These are rooted in the communal atmosphere of the people. One side of the road shares magazines, with no formal system, just the trust that they will be passed along. News from looking at newspapers or splurging on Internet time is passed from person to person. But, there is no evidence of books in these homes other than the government issued textbooks.

3. Implications: Growing the Field of Hope as Expressed by the Local Community

There are numerous U.S. non-profit organizations along with church organizations whose mission it is to support rural Cambodians. Nuth (2018) observes that "...Cambodia's inclusive education programmes are mostly driven by international donors and non-governmental organisations..." and Kalyanpur (2014) describes disconnections between the agendas of donors and local needs. My time in this rural village revealed specific needs and questionable outside donor solutions. Below, I offer specific solutions, based on observed and expressed practices and needs.

On more than one occasion, I was shown English books donated by such associations. Rural villages and schools have been the recipients of computers, DVRs, and other technology. My research reveals that few in Cambodian villages read or speak Khmer (the Cambodian language). The absence of electricity yields computers and the like unusable. Rather, the observations of these homes and the villager interviews yield ways to build upon rural practices, relevant to the realistic needs as indicated through this study. Suggestions for programs that can be supported are outlined below.

The thriving magazine lending library among the village women is more than a helpful source of information about fashion, recipes, and health for these women. When mothers read, children see literacy in action, a powerful demonstration. It is then a common sight that is expected and valued in the home. This sharing library benefits both mothers and their children. But there is more to do when it comes to literacy in Cambodia. There are limitations with literacy opportunities in the rural areas. For literacy development to be truly realized in rural Cambodia, such literacy events cannot be left to happenstance.

One of these partnerships that may provide meaningful employment for educated women and help the U.S. positively contribute to Cambodian needs may be accomplished by expanding the informal women's lending library for magazines. Educated Khmer females, perhaps university students, may be sent to villages to interview women about their practices, ranging from recipes to childcare. This information would form the basis for pamphlets and magazines to become part of village lending libraries. This would lead to meaningful employment for both educated women and for those local women who are currently working to weave a living wage from the seemingly defunct or unprofitable basket industry. Women who are involved in such "libraries" could share their experiences to help near-by villagers to establish similar programs.

A program of mobile libraries could be created. Books printed in Khmer could be taken from village to village by tuk-tuk drivers. This would assure these drivers have steady employment, which is a concern to many of these men. Villagers who have received training could act as librarians and keep records of book lending. This would assure steady employment for many and deliver a continual stream of children's books, women's magazines, agricultural pamphlets, and news of current events to villages.

An additional observation leads to another consideration regarding local employment opportunities. In the minimal school library, there sits a sea turtle book, which contains a hand-created translation pasted over the English text. This practice could not only provide meaningful employment for any villagers

who translate English to Khmer but would assist literacy growth. High school graduates who are fluent in English could be employed to translate books or even to write new material for primary students. This would not just add to needed literacy material but would model the value of literacy for others in the village.

4. Conclusion

Despite the horrific slaughter of a generation of educated citizens, residents of this hidden Cambodian village present a positive and hopeful mural for the educational future of their country. Most articulate the value of education and believe in the importance of supporting, at least, with words, the rural community school. There is an optimistic tone that rings through the village, much like that tone emitted when a child hits the school's makeshift school bell: that exploded American bomb shell hit with a rock. Villagers, even those who lived through educationally-based genocide embrace a strong educational future for their village.

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