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Global Consultation Processes: Lessons Learned from Refugee Teacher Consultation Research in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

The process of global consultation has received little attention despite its potential for promoting international mutual understanding with marginalized communities. This article details theory, entry, implementation, and evaluation processes for global consultation research, including lessons learned from our refugee teacher intervention. The first half of the article addresses the entry process, culture-specific strengths, and challenges that can be faced in global consultation, including our experience with a lack of formal regulatory oversight of refugee education. The second half of the article details feedback collected from consultants, peer trainers, and peer trainees indicating which training content was most valuable; how some Burmese refugee teachers strive for a more student-centered, "free" classroom for their refugee students; and, finally, the toll that intense refugee teacher consultation took on the consultants.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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Consultation research in a global context can be both a rare opportunity and a significant challenge. Given the limited literature on global consultation research, studies are needed that articulate the process involved in establishing, implementing, and evaluating consultation intervention research internationally, especially in developing countries. Guided by a participatory culture-specific consultation approach (PCSC; Nastasi, Varjas, Bernstein, & Jayasena, 2000), the current article details lessons learned about theory, early decision-making processes, country and partner-organization entry, identification of culture-specific strengths, challenges, intervention development, and iterative intervention feedback.

In the first half of this article, lessons learned about theory, entry, relationship building, strengths, and challenges in the process are explained from the perspective of the first author, as an American entering Malaysia for the purpose of conducting consultation research. The second half of the article includes lessons learned from consultation feedback from both consultees

and consultants as part of our refugee-teacher-train-refugee-teacher intervention research in Malaysia.

Theoretical model

In academia, a theoretical model or base is typically viewed as an indicator of research quality. We would argue that a theoretical model is more than merely a base for research quality purposes; it is also a grounding base for researchers out in the international field. A theoretical base can be grounding because sometimes the disorienting nature of international research in developing countries can lead consultation researchers to feel like they are wandering way off base.

Not many theoretical models are designed to fit international consultation research. PCSC, by contrast, offers a highly systematic set of steps to rely on in order to make sure that relationships, partnerships, intervention development, and implementation are conducted with the goal of making the work highly relevant to the target culture. The PCSC model provides a framework for the culture-specific development of interventions in new cultures via relationship building, formative investigation of target problems, culture-informed adaptation of existing interventions, and evaluation, in addition to reliance on an ecological framework accounting for multilevel effects on students, such as sociopolitical effects (see our detailed review of PCSC in another article in this issue, O'Neal et al., 2017; Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). In many ways, PCSC is a primer for school psychologists and educational researchers on how to incorporate anthropological methods, like ethnography, into psychological and educational studies abroad, or even with ethnic minority cultures in the United States (Nastasi et al., 2000; Varjas et al., 2006). For this research, we not only relied on PCSC for intervention development, but and also used a PCSC approach as the backbone for the structure of this article. Therefore, we frame our lessons learned in terms of PCSC steps with an emphasis on partnerships and feedback necessary for culturally specific intervention development. Especially relevant for the purposes of this article, PCSC involves collecting qualitative feedback after each iteration of an intervention, and the second half of this article reports feedback we received from multiple perspectives.

Country and partner selection

Country selection

Careful decision making needs to be balanced with an open mind before choosing a country with which to work. When I¹ was debating which country

¹"Me" or "I" refers to the first author; "Our" or "We" refers to this article's entire set of authors.

to complete my Fulbright Teaching and Research Award in, I was nudged toward Southeast Asia by well-traveled friends who felt a warm welcome and ease of establishing new relationships in Southeast Asia. Such porous boundaries in country borders and relationship building may make it easier to establish a productive collaborative relationship. In our case, a porous border also made it easier for us to reach refugees because they could flee across Malaysia's porous borders and establish lives in Malaysia.

When deciding which country to choose, it is important to consider whether a developing country is ready for research, instead of simply ready for relief (Benatar, 2002). Laos is an example of a country that might not have been ideal for research-based interventions. Unlike Malaysia, most nonprofit organizations in Laos had not yet developed beyond the stage of wanting relief for their target groups. Malaysia, by contrast, had many stable, well-established nonprofit organizations that had provided interventions for years and even decades, and many of these organizations seemed open to evaluation and research-based interventions.

Another important selection criterion is how permissive the government is about foreigners conducting research on sensitive political topics and populations. When I applied for a Fulbright Research/Teaching Scholar award, I had to choose a country. I was only aware of official barriers to research in certain countries, as listed on the Fulbright application website. While China clearly did not accept any Fulbright researchers who planned to conduct scientific research, Malaysia did not officially exclude any foreigners from conducting research in the country. In many countries, however, there are unofficial barriers to research on sensitive political topics and groups. For example, I learned after conducting refugee research in Malaysia that Thailand has an unofficial policy of not accepting any Fulbright scholars who want to do refugee research, given concerns about political fallout from such sensitive research (personal communication, May 5, 2012). In Malaysia, I suspect that my Fulbright application was accepted by U.S. embassy officials partially because it did not include refugee research; my decision to research refugees came after I arrived and discovered the hidden population of refugees in Malaysia. A couple years later, the U.S. embassy rejected a Fulbright student's application due to its explicit plan to work with refugees, deeming it too sensitive.

Changing politics, however, can make sensitive research turn from prohibited to encouraged, in just one visit. In 2015, President Obama visited a large refugee school in Malaysia to underscore the need for supporting postconflict refugees worldwide (Olorunnipa & Keane, 2015). Following this visit, U.S. embassy officials made clear statements to the Malaysian Fulbright commission that Fulbright refugee research was now not only acceptable but encouraged.

Language is another important criterion, but is more flexible than might be imagined. If English is not the official language of a country, one might dismiss that country as not feasible for intervention or data collection. In reality, English

and/or translation may be more feasible than imagined. In our case, Malaysia had previously been a British colony, and, until recently, English had been taught in Malaysian public schools. Therefore, nearly all of our Chinese-Malaysian and Indian-Malaysian colleagues, consultants/trainers, and data collectors spoke English. One might imagine, however, that refugees from Burma would not speak English. Once on the ground, we discovered that English was, indeed, spoken by the refugee school leaders and many of the refugee teachers since a goal of refugee education was to help postconflict refugee students be prepared for the possibility of resettlement in English-speaking countries such as the United States, England, and Australia. However, once we built deeper trust and visited more hard-to-reach refugee schools, it became clear that those schools were largely conducted in the refugees' native tongue, which was typically an ethnic Burmese language such as Chin or Karen. Therefore, we trained at least one refugee teacher who was bilingual English and Burmese ethnic-language-speaking at the more hard-to-reach schools, and that peer teacher trained fellow refugee teachers in their native language.

Choosing university partners

Developing university partnerships is essential. Professors, graduate students, and undergraduates at local universities have the ability to act as cultural brokers and collaborators in intervention implementation and sustainability after you leave the country. As a Fulbright Research/Teaching Scholar Award applicant, I had to choose not only my target country but also the target university where I would teach. It can be very challenging to discern quality of higher education from the other side of the world. I wanted to figure out which universities might have the best psychology programs in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. I had no way to determine which was best, so I decided that my criterion for choosing a university to teach in and partner with was having psychology faculty who had been former Fulbrighters from Malaysia to the United States; they had received their doctoral degrees in the United States. In one psychology department, I found a few former Fulbrighters, and I noticed that they did intervention research with nonprofit organizations such as UNICEF. Therefore, I thought they might be potential collaborators and able to open doors with local Malaysian nonprofit organizations.

Choosing nonprofit organization partners

Local nonprofit organizations are ideal for partnership since they have already built trust with the target population, and they have existing systems and staff in place for implementing interventions (Israel et al., 2006; Schensul, 1999). It may be hard to determine what nonprofit organizations even exist in your field of interest. Through connections at the local university where I taught, I met with

leaders at World Vision-Malaysia. World Vision gave me an overview of each of the nonprofit groups they fund in Malaysia and put me in contact with them. World Vision then explained to me that there was a hidden world of over 150,000 refugees in Malaysia. This world of refugees had been hidden to me because being a refugee is illegal in Malaysia, and the government is known for human rights abuses against refugees (Low, Kok, & Lee, 2014; Malaysia Immigration Act 1959/63; Nathan, 2012).

Country entry

Country entry: Culture shock

After the excitement of initial country and partner institutional entry wears off, culture shock hits. Initially, adventurous exploration of a new city and surrounding countries in addition to new relationship building can be exhilarating. Even getting a business card, necessary for legitimacy and trust building in Asia, and the cultural rituals around exchanging cards (e.g., a slight bow, holding the card across your other arm in offering it, and a close, slow examination of their card) were exciting. But, after some weeks, culture shock hit. Culture shock, for me, felt like confusion and anxiety oddly combined with a muted feeling, similar to mild sadness, along with some low frustration tolerance. The repeated newness overwhelmed my foreign mind. I did not identify my culture shock symptoms for what they were until I reached out to a former Fulbrighter to Malaysia who was an anthropology professor all too familiar with culture shock. After identifying my confusion, anxiety, and low frustration tolerance as culture shock, she strongly recommended that I stop all travel, exploration of the country, and unnecessary meeting of so many new people until my mind adjusted. It took a couple weeks to feel like I was back to normal again. It was a new normal since living for a year in such a foreign country never quite feels like normal.

Country entry: Awakenings

Upon first entering another country in the pursuit of consultation research, it is easy to underestimate what you do not know about the new culture (Rosenfield, 2014). There is so much that is neither visible nor comprehensible, but it is easy for new researchers to assume that they see and understand much about the new culture. Who and what can help a new consultation researcher see the invisible? I give examples below of my experience with being blind then seeing.

First, I went through a political awakening on how Burmese military junta government oppression of ethnic minorities led Burmese ethnic minorities to flee to Malaysia, where they then experienced Malaysian government human rights abuses (e.g., caning while in detention; Low et al., 2014; Nathan 2012). Not until I conducted some research in Burma on Burmese education did I

understand the origins of some of the Burmese refugee teachers' teacher-centered practices and reliance on the cane as corporal punishment in refugee classrooms in Malaysia (O'Neal, 2011).

Second, I went through another awakening when I grew to understand that the Malaysian government was turning a blind eye to the refugee schools. The Malaysian government had an official policy of not allowing refugees into their country, but they allowed the refugee schools to exist anyway. Where were the unofficial lines refugees could not cross? One refugee school's students were harassed by citizens who threatened to call the immigration police; this refugee school then moved to a new location, which felt safer. UNHCR and a refugee school leader explained to me that the lines refugee schools cannot cross are often blurry, which leads refugee schools to be very careful not to get unnecessary attention from citizens, police, immigration officers, or the government. For example, many refugee schools were hidden in low-income, isolated neighborhoods, and the schools were typically located in apartments or garages in the same high-rise apartment buildings in which the refugee children and their families resided. This added a layer of protection as the students did not need to walk outside of their apartment buildings to get to school. I also noticed that to avoid attracting dangerous attention, none of the refugee schools that I visited had school identification outside of the buildings. When I went to visit my first refugee school, with over 500 students, I could not find it. There were no signs with the school name outside any building.

Third, although I initially thought I knew how to build trust with hard-to-reach, vulnerable populations when I arrived in Malaysia, I learned that I did not know how to build trust on refugee terms. Building trust with refugee schools was a long process that required going from the top of a complex hierarchy to reach grassroots, community-based refugee schools. Once we reached the refugee schools, we were happy to receive a warm welcome from the schools along with eager enthusiasm from teachers who wanted training. Since refugee teachers are not allowed by the Malaysian government to pursue higher education, they are desperate for any teacher training. To build trust on refugee terms, we first started at the top of the hierarchy, which is an important place to start in many Asian communities that tend to value hierarchical respect in communication (Chen & Chung, 1994; Zhang, Lin, Nonaka, & Beom, 2005). I cannot overemphasize the importance of obtaining an introduction on your behalf from someone higher on the ladder to someone lower on the ladder. For example, we obtained a personal introduction from the president of World Vision-Malaysia to the school director of the largest refugee school in Malaysia. Such an introduction said, without words, that I was worthy of trust from a refugee school leader, who understandably is slow to trust when he has such a large school of refugees to protect. This introduction process, typically over food at a local favorite community restaurant, was necessary with each new person I met in refugee education. Such meetings were unlike the school

meetings I was used to in the United States, which always took place around a conference table. Many refugee leaders expected to first take me and my family out for meals. For example, for my first meeting with one school's leaders, they insisted on taking me and my family out to celebrate the Chinese New Year with them and their children. They taught me and my family to toss the ceremonial Chinese New Year salad in the air. This is where I initially learned about the low boundaries between work and family among refugee leaders in Malaysia. They often dragged their children to meals with "VIP" guests like me. It is not uncommon for nonprofit organization leadership in Malaysia to be led by husbands and wives and, sometimes, their families.

Then, after respectful eating of the Chinese New Year meal together, the refugee school leaders were very direct with me about their biggest concerns. The biggest concern at the largest refugee school was disruptive misbehavior at school. They wanted me to help arrange for graduate students from the local university, where I taught as part of my Fulbright, to come to their refugee school to have fieldwork experience as psychological screeners and counselors. This required open communication and flexibility on my part, so I communicated that I had come hoping to train teachers on classroom management as part of their refugee teacher professional development training system the refugee school already had in place. I also had previously done mental health screening research. So, we compromised, and I first trained graduate students to screen and counsel the refugee students, and I collected that data as formative preintervention consultation research. Then we collaborated on the development of the refugee teacher training intervention I was imagining.

Fourth, after committing to do my pilot research with the largest refugee school, I was struck by some of the resentment other community refugee schools and even UNHCR expressed toward the largest school. Over time it became clear that, while the leaders might have earned others' resentment by some of their decisions, much of the resentment seemed bred by competition over scarce resources. Highly limited resources can lead to resentment, competition, and conflict, which can be easy to accidentally step into as a foreign newcomer.

Culture-specific strengths

As with most consultation, it is necessary to look for client strengths. In the case of entry with research abroad, it is important to look for country, local, and nonprofit strengths too. The strengths in consultation research abroad lie, unsurprisingly, in relationships. The relationships are rewarding not only professionally, but also personally; many of my relationships have lasted for years and have become close.

Relationships with university professors, graduate students, and administrators were very important and necessary for the success of our intervention and evaluation. Once one finds university colleagues with a common mission, it is

possible to work together to build a small army. Teaching graduate coursework in clinical psychology at a local Malaysian university led to a small army of graduate student clinicians to conduct mental health screenings and counseling with refugee students, in addition to consultation/training research with refugee teachers. Undergraduate and graduate students were especially interested in participating in our research because, otherwise, most of their research experiences were limited to conducting studies of undergraduates on campus. My teaching at the university led to development of relationships with local professors, including one who is a coauthor on this article and another who is a coauthor on another article about this research (O'Neal et al., 2016). The professors were interested in collaborating and continuing some of the intervention and publication work even after I left the country. We all developed relationships with refugee educators and religious groups who supported refugee education. Another small army of local Malaysians were part of religious social networks of volunteers and refugee educators. In addition, we built relationships with American and European expats and diplomats who worked on human rights or as volunteer refugee educators.

Another culture-specific strength was Malaysian and refugee respect for scholarship and scholars, which opened many doors and led to high refugee interest in our training/consultation. In some ways, our ideal of a refugee-teacher-train-refugee-teacher model of consultation was a bit of a disappointment to some refugee teacher trainees since they wanted to be exposed to training from the American scholars and other professors as experts. Partly, this is because teachers who are refugees are not allowed to get exposure to such scholars in higher education since Malaysia bars refugees from public higher education.

Refugee teachers do not get much, if any, professional development, so they do not take professional development for granted. Limited resources made the refugee training institution, with whom we partnered, feel like they needed to limit how many refugee teachers could take part in our training. An entire group of five Afghan refugee teachers came for the first iteration of training even though only one had been invited from their school. I found myself arguing for the extra teachers to come in and join the training, but the training institution leaders felt strongly that if they let some in, then they would have a tsunami of refugee teachers trying to get into the next training. The compromise struck was that the uninvited teachers could be trained but they would not be given certificates at the end of the training, much to the chagrin of the Afghan refugee teachers.

A surprising gift unique to Malaysian culture was the free “in-kind” donations to our refugee intervention research of filmmaking, studios, publication of handbooks, and so on. Again, my coauthors' connections in the Christian, largely Chinese-Malaysian community of filmmakers and small business publishers enhanced our project tenfold. Using film, we were able to spread the word of our project and raise awareness of refugees in Malaysia. Indeed, this

opportunity for filmmaking created a passion in me for an arm of consultation little used by U.S. consultants—advocacy via film for spreading the word about your clients. Such collaboration with my coauthors and filmmakers in Malaysia opened a world of expressive creativity about refugees in my dissemination of this research. This expression included artworks elicited from refugee children demonstrating their flight from Burma to Malaysia, in addition to artworks illustrating what their communities and villagers looked like back in Burma.

Challenges

Lack of regulatory oversight

The most difficult challenge was the lack of regulatory oversight of refugee schools. The lack of oversight became a serious problem when a refugee student and a nonrefugee student who went through our mental health screenings described some of the worst physical abuse I have ever heard. Both told me of horrible abuse from their parents, such as a parent hammering the refugee students' fingers and using a stun gun as punishment. When I spoke with refugee school directors, they explained that I could not contact Malaysian child protective services for a refugee child since the child and family would then be put in detention, caned as punishment, and, if they were lucky, deported back to Burma. If they were unlucky, they would be sold into slavery on Thai fishing boats, as has happened to a number of refugees in Malaysia (Kelly, 2015). The school directors had faced this quandary before, and they solved it by bringing the refugee student into their dormitory full time. At my next meeting with the school directors, they surprised me by inviting the abusive father to our meeting for me to confront him and tell him that his son was no longer living with him on weekends but, instead, would be staying at the refugee school full time. Given the extensive regulatory oversight in the United States, with Child Protective Services handling abusive parents, I had never had to confront and tell a parent that his child was being removed from his home. I was shocked when the parent calmly confirmed his use of a hammer and stun gun on his son and explained that he regularly used the stun gun not only on his son but as a tool of punishment on refugee workers at his workplace, ironically called "Human Connections." In shock, I grabbed the arm of the school director next to me, who seemed completely nonplussed by the disturbing confirmation of child abuse in addition to the abuse by a refugee of other refugees. The father said he was relieved that his son was not coming home on weekends anymore since he and his girlfriend had trouble managing the boy's behavior.

The violence only got worse. The nonrefugee student raped the refugee student in the school dormitory repeatedly. Dormitory staff were then violent toward the nonrefugee student. The nonrefugee student ran away, returned much later, then was sent away to work on a farm for punishment. The refugee school sent the refugee student home with the abusive father. UNHCR-Malaysia got involved and

removed the refugee student from the abusive father's home. UNHCR involved me, and I conducted an interview that confirmed that he had, indeed, been raped repeatedly at his refugee school by the nonrefugee student. UNHCR-Malaysia told the original school and me that the school should have referred the refugee student to UNHCR from the beginning for parental physical abuse and later for peer sexual abuse. I wish I had known that UNHCR was an informal regulatory agency for refugee student safety. At the same time, UNHCR is nearly powerless in a country that is not a signatory to the U.N. convention protecting refugees, and how can we expect UNHCR's word and leverage to carry much weight?

This violent tale of a refugee and nonrefugee child is an example of how, as a researcher and consultant, it is essential that you have colleagues and friends/family who can be your touchstone during intensive consultation work abroad. I returned home stunned the days I learned of the physical and sexual violence to the refugee student, and my husband took over with our kids and provided me with strong support. My husband and Malaysian colleagues were able to bring me back to reality, since I had felt transported to another, more abusive planet where people seem, at least on the surface, to have become numb to extreme physical and sexual abuse by parents, staff, and peer students.

Reaching the hardest to reach

It is very difficult to reach the hardest-to-reach refugees. In Malaysia, the hardest-to-reach refugees were the Muslim Rohingya from Burma. Although I spent an entire day with a Muslim Rohingya school director and spoke with some of his teachers, they were difficult to recruit for our training, despite our outreach. Our impression was that they were just trying to survive and cope with severe health and familial breakdown in their community due to their being trapped in limbo in Malaysia for so long.

The next half of the article details feedback we obtained after the refugee-teacher-train-refugee-teacher intervention. The goal of the feedback was to inform the development of our intervention as a participatory, culture-specific intervention. We end this article with reflections on our experiences with the processes and feedback on our refugee education consultation.

Intervention feedback case study

The second half of our article shares feedback given to us after our refugee-teacher-train-refugee-teacher intervention was completed in Malaysia. In this second half, we provide an illustration of lessons learned from trainee feedback obtained from all trainers and trainees: consultants, peer trainers, and peer trainees. The most important part of our building a participatory, culture-specific consultation approach was obtaining qualitative feedback from all stakeholders and trainees, repeatedly across many intervention iterations. Such feedback is essential for the

development of consultation interventions abroad. The purpose of detailing the feedback is to demonstrate the rich value of obtaining feedback across multiple iterations of the intervention. From this feedback, we gleaned lessons learned for others interested in international consultation research. First, we describe the intervention. Then, we detail the feedback.

Resilient Refugee Education intervention: Training and consultation

Refugee teachers were trained by professional local consultants over two days on the following topics: refugee student mental health; empathy for refugee students; teaching in a refugee classroom; rules, transitions; positive teacher-child relationships; praise; rewards; and star charts. In addition, discipline, time-outs, and helping children with feelings were covered. The training also focused in depth on teacher self-care, including stress, anxiety, and anger management strategies. On the third and final day of training, peer trainers were offered information and practice on how to train their peers.

The peer trainee training interventions were led by one or more peer trainers at each of seven schools, with logistical support from two of the four professional consultants. Note that consultants offered to provide in-class observation, problem-solving, and emotion-focused consultation on peer trainers' concerns around implementing the classroom management techniques in their own classrooms. There was no uptake on the offer of individual in-class consultation, however.

The peer trainers taught the material using very brief explanations in simple English combined with modeling behaviors (e.g., How to give a "time-out") and by helping the trainees role play classroom management strategies in front of the group or in pairs. The Resilient Refugee Education (RRE) refugee teacher handbook, *Happy Teacher, Happy Students*, was created as an easy-to-read guidebook for current and future refugee teachers to implement the intervention; the book had many visual images and was written in English, Arabic, and Burmese. A secondary goal of the handbook was to act as an informal, visual manual to organize and guide the peer trainers and trainees through the RRE training process. Details on this intervention and quantitative intervention effects are detailed in another article on this intervention (O'Neal, Gosnell, Ng, and Ong, 2017).

Evaluation procedure

On the first day of training, the preintervention quantitative assessment was conducted just before training started. On the last day of training, the same postintervention assessment was conducted just after training ended. The quantitative assessments and results are described in another article in this issue (O'Neal et al., 2017). Feedback was highly important as we were guided by the PCSC

model, which emphasizes the necessity for consultee feedback throughout the process of designing and implementing an intervention. For this article, we describe the feedback on the intervention process, which was collected in small group interviews with consultants, peer trainers, and peer trainees. The original intent was for this feedback to be a part of our broader empirical findings that were presented in the two empirical articles in this issue on our refugee intervention research, but logistical and local conditions made doing rigorous qualitative postintervention feedback impossible. However, consistent with PCSC, we share the feedback we did obtain.

Postintervention feedback: Peer trainer group interviews

Feedback was obtained from nine peer trainers across three different small group interviews on their experience with (a) being trained as a peer trainer, (b) being a trainer of peer teachers, and (c) having consultants who supported their peer trainings. The peer trainers were largely Burmese refugees, and their feedback indicated that this training in child-centered teaching was very different from the traditional Burmese cultural approach, which they described as teacher centered, authoritarian, and reliant on the cane for physical punishment. They reported, however, that they appreciated this training's new style of managing behaviors as they were now aware of more "positive" ways to discipline. Trainees also reported that as refugees who hoped to be resettled to the United States, where they thought they would no longer be able to use the Burmese style of managing behaviors, they wanted opportunities to learn alternative ways of managing student behaviors. One Burmese peer trainer put the connection between the sociogeopolitical change they have made in their lives as refugees and roles as educators eloquently:

When we go outside [of Burma], we want freedom of expression, freedom of religious and we want to release tension because while we are in Burma, when the teacher says something we just listen quietly whether it is right or not. We don't have any option. When we are teaching outside Burma, we feel something different—we enjoy, we are free, we have options. There is no choice in the classroom in Burma as student. We dare not express as a student whether we agree to disagree. But it is better that students have that opportunity—so we welcome training like this that allows us to help the students express themselves.

This teacher made a connection among personal experiences as a student in Burma, the hopes for their own students outside of Burma, and their newfound freedom from an authoritarian state and education in Burma, now that they have fled Burma.

When asked why they wanted to be peer trainers, one commented that they wanted to help teachers best prepare students for possible future resettlement:

Because for me I want to spread the message to other teachers. Many teachers don't know and they are struggling on how to manage behavior. This is especially

important for when we resettle. For example here in the class you have all the students shouting “Teacher! Teacher!” but in the U.S. they cannot do that. If they shout they have to go to meet the principal. So it is important for the teachers to teach these students how to behave well in the classroom.

All trainees felt the training on self-care was the most helpful. They felt more aware of the need to take care of themselves before they can effectively manage the classroom. Prior to the self-care training, some felt less able to cope with their numerous health problems, unable to concentrate, and ineffective in the classroom. After learning new self-care strategies, trainees expressed more confidence in being able to manage their own stress and stay focused on the classroom.

The self-care strategy that peer trainers said was most useful was self-talk. They reported that knowing how to encourage oneself and to speak more positively about a situation helped them cope with stressful situations and overcome personal challenges. Managing stress via deep breathing, physical exercise, positive thinking, and practicing the relaxation techniques was also helpful for trainees. One trainer also implemented some of the self-care strategies in the classroom. For example, when students seem bored, they do deep breathing exercises or the physical exercises that the intervention recommended for students, and after that, they feel refreshed and ready to start lessons again. This trainer also shared that s/he feels more joy in teaching the class now because the students seem happier and more eager to learn.

In terms of classroom management, empathy was the most useful skill for teachers. Trainers reported being able to understand their students better—how to talk to a troubled child and how to handle misbehaviors by showing that they were listening to the student.

I realise that I myself listen more to the children after the training. Last time we do listen but not so much, because we are the ones talking to the children, now it is really because of the empathy skills. Sometimes the children want to talk to you so ... I give more time so they just talk to me, then I just listen to them about what happened in their house, and if anything happen, like the children argue with each other, then I just listen to them, talk to them one by one, then I let them decide—who is wrong, who is right ... Previously, I will listen but I do the judgment—“ok you are right ...” and so on, but now I ask them to think about why it happened.

In addition to empathy skills, the peer trainer teachers felt more confident to address children who had difficult behaviors (e.g., hyperactivity, talking back) and those who came from troubled homes.

In my home country I have done this before but I don't know how to use it here because children come from different communities like Burmese children and so there are different experience with many countries' children. So the thing is to show our care and love to them through our behavior, then they will open up to say something ... I try to show the children “actually you're very important. You're really very important” ... now she feels like actually my teacher trusts me, and she loves me and she cares

for me. She is more relaxed and satisfied right now. So all these things are really good because of that training.

I feel [the training] is relevant. Students they become more open and talk to me, and I feel like I'm not so strict. Sometimes teachers can be strict also and this is also mixed with rigid, because you can be strict and at the same time, we tend to be rigid so we are stuck. Not flexible. I feel like after this, the child come to me, more often than before. Myself as a teacher I listen more, I become more understanding of my children.

The only skill that did not work for some trainers was the positive ignoring. One trainer shared, "One lesson I cannot apply to my classroom is the positive ignoring because when my student did something wrong, I always go directly to them and instruct them immediately ... If I ignore them I worry that it might make it worse." Instead of ignoring, the trainer preferred to use time-out.

All peer trainers described the process of training their peers as one that started out as very stressful but gradually got easier to manage. For all trainers in the focus groups, this was their first time training any adults.

For me before the first round training I feel very stressful! I thought it would not happen—I would not be able to do it. I think it is a heaven sent opportunity to be a trainer because we are refugees we cannot do all this. More than I expected, we completed the session successful. When I did the second one—I was more comfortable.

For many, they noticed effects on their peer trainees, in how their trainees changed as teachers in the classroom after their peer training. "I see most of them before, they shout so much at the students, after that I think they don't shout."

One teacher she beat the students, when we tell her about the skills, now she change. Now she's better with her students. She didn't know about the skills. Also, she's a refugee and she feels stressed, that's why. But when we tell her how to take care for herself, and after that about the student, I think better.

Before the training I think they use some of these skills but they use it the wrong way. For example give them timeout and ask the student to sit under chair for 10 minutes. Now in this book they say just 5 minutes, not more than 5 minutes, after that you have to explain to the child. So they learn they were doing this wrong and now this is how we should use this skill.

Given the lack of access to formal training, education, supervision, and books, these trainers seemed hungry for some guidance to offer their peer teachers who might struggle, sometimes, with how to manage misbehavior. It was also notable that the trainer quoted in the preceding seemed to feel empathy for her peers' stress as refugees. She explained that her peer's use of corporal punishment was due to her stress as a refugee.

After all the peer trainers completed their training, they received consultation from the consultants who led their training. Each peer trainer was part of a small group guided by a pair of consultants in their implementation of the peer training. Often, a group of peer trainers implemented the training together.

The consultation process involved a consultant going to the peer trainers' schools. The consultant helped peer trainers plan and gain confidence and skills in running a peer training themselves.

To better illustrate some of the unique implementation support that the consultants gave their peer trainers to help them implement the training in their schools, some trainers who all had the same male consultant discussed their experience: "My consultant was really helpful. Because of his encouragement we can stand in front and train so I am very thankful to him."

I have no idea what more he could have done but he helped us a lot with advice and time management. We learn of lot of things, how to do different activities or ways to carry out the exercises. He came many times to meet us. He came about four to five times to meet us and it was very practical so it was useful. He also came for the training and gave us feedback.

Like before the training he taught us how to do the role play—how many persons; how to make group activities—who is the recorder—all the roles; also brainstorming—how to write down if they say something. All this is explained clearly to us so we keep this in mind when we train. Before we were not sure what is brainstorming and role play—we also forgot many things after the training. So he help us remember again and understand better.

Like they said, we also did some trial sessions [with our consultant] like we are teaching the class. We had to imagine that all the teachers are there and use the whiteboard like the actual training session.

Consultants met with their peer trainers at least three times and provided much guidance and support:

Our consultant gave us a lot of encouragement. Even when we speak poor English ... she still encourage us, she reads our body language and gives feedback. Overall it was a positive experience. I have experienced a lot since coming here and some people treat us like we are aliens, strangers, inferior, but all of you—the way you treat us are friendly ... like we are the same.

It was striking that the act of treating the peer trainers with respect was so valued by these refugees who felt disrespected by many in Malaysia.

We asked how likely the peer trainers were to train future peer teachers, and some peer trainers were excited to deliver more training so they could improve their skills as trainers and build their confidence. Others were not eager to deliver more training due to lack of time. They might, however, offer training again if school management was supportive, and if there was someone there to encourage them, as the consultants did.

Peer trainee group interviews

Postintervention focus groups were also conducted with nine peer trainees from three refugee schools. They reported that the role plays and hands-on,

participatory nature made the training interesting. Peer trainees reported that training delivered by their peers was far more practical and relevant than any other training the teachers had attended before. All peer trainees found it helpful to be trained by their fellow teachers because it was in their own native language, which made it easier to understand, and the peer trainers understood the teaching styles and behavioral issues in their school.

So it was easier to understand and comprehend. It's better that the training was in Burmese—easier for teachers to understand. Also, I think this close connection between the trainer and the trainee. They understand our teaching styles and classrooms so that was helpful.

Similar to peer trainers, peer trainees found the parts of the training about empathy and speaking with students about emotions helpful. One teacher expressed: “Some of the students are scared to ask question so I will go and sit beside them and then they will ask the question or tell me how they feel.” Teachers also reported finding it easier to ask students about their problems and understand how to make students more comfortable in sharing their emotions. Skills they now use when speaking to students include looking them in the eyes, sitting with them patiently, asking them about how they feel, appreciating them when they do good things, giving them kind words, and asking them about their family/home life.

Many of the behavioral-focused classroom management skills that the peer trainees found relevant in their classrooms included star charts, stickers, and timeouts.

I'm a new teacher. Before this training, I don't know how to teach, how to organize and how to give them punishment and how to appreciate if they do good things. But after this training I come to know more about those things. The most, I apply is that star chart. Like if the student do work at their homework, I will give high five and the star chart and then sticker also. Before I never use these things. Also, some children, their face looked so sad and then some they cannot listen and after the training I learn I must look at them eyes to eyes, and it was so effective for me I think. Then sometimes I use time-out. Before I never do that.

Like peer trainers, peer trainees found the self-care training to be the most helpful. Specific self-care topics that were most useful for some trainees included deep breathing exercises, positive thinking, and ways to relax. One teacher did explain that self-talk was helpful “because previously my thinking was more negative ... and sometimes I'm angry. But now I control myself.” For another teacher, whenever students did not perform, she would previously have negative thoughts about that student; now she tells herself that one day the student will improve, and she does not feel as hopeless. When asked what self-care strategy was helpful, one commented:

This information really worked actually. When we were really stressed like some of the children really drive you crazy and that time you have to be patient. Sometimes

as a human being you also feel your anger is going to burst when you are dealing with the students so the self-care topics really help to calm down ourselves and we use it when we are really stressed otherwise other people going to suffer when you don't manage your anger.

Overall, peer trainees reported having a better understanding of their students and improved student-teacher relationships; some appreciated the need to practice emotional empathy skills with students. Empathy was not received as well by some peer trainees who felt that it would undermine their authority in the classroom and lead to a lack of respect from their students. Some found it hard to implement empathy as they perceived it to require them to treat their students as friends.

School systemic issues may be another limitation in the feasibility of peer trainees implementing some of the new strategies. Some teachers felt less empowered to apply skills and speak to students differently when their schools lacked rules and regulations or “proper” leadership. One trainee stated:

The skills are good for a well-run school but our school has very basic problems which prevent us from using the skills in the first place. Also I think we don't know our students background very well and manager doesn't share this information with us.

Most trainees found the training relevant to their culture and style of teaching. At the same time, some pointed out that there were parts of the training that were very different from the “old” style of teaching—which was standing in front of a classroom with a chalkboard and a cane. In the past and in Burma, they reported that teachers very rarely listened to or tried to understand their students, so empathy was not culturally relevant. One trainee shared: “Our culture is more we understand the teacher not the student—what the teacher wants.” Although these skills were new and culturally different, teachers seemed quite comfortable and receptive toward using these new skills, similar to the peer trainers. “In Burma the motto is child centered but the practice is more teacher centered. The teacher will say keep quiet. If she want to beat, she can beat or cane. Nothing we can do.” The theme of embracing the new teaching style, as a deliberate choice away from their old Burmese teaching styles, was echoed among peer trainees too.

The training was different but because we are in Malaysia, we cannot use Burmese style. Also when we resettled to U.S., we definitely cannot use the style we use in Burma but have to use the skills we learn this time. So this change is very important because we are refugee, we need to learn this skills. We are very lucky to learn this.

Consultant feedback

This study included a feedback group with all four of the follow-up consultants, who were also the consultants who conducted the original training of peer trainers. The consultants, overall, seemed fairly burned out after all the trainings and consultations they conducted over many months, especially with refugees,

who were a stressed population. After the intense trainings, the consultants felt like all their energy dropped, and it was difficult to get energized to do the follow-up consultation with the peer trainers leading peer trainings.

I am actually glad that it is finished. Feb/March was the peak and now we have used up too much energy. Now there is an anti-climax. It just takes up too much energy and time and our expectations were not managed.

They were surprised and concerned that only four of the original 22 nonrefugee teachers led a peer training. They were concerned about a potential power imbalance between the nonrefugee teachers training their refugee peer teachers; such imbalance might stymie open, vulnerable conversation and questions.

Eventually [the nonrefugee teachers] dropped out so that was quite discouraging but then later on I worked with another refugee group, and they were very motivated and committed. I enjoyed working with them because they were very excited about it.

I also think the nonrefugee teachers we got were also the volunteer teacher who come in once a week so I think that was the extent of their commitment towards the refugee communities. Getting them to do more seem to be hard because they have their own personal [responsibilities].

There is this power differentiation with nonrefugee teachers as well. For example powerful nonrefugee teachers—there is a perception of refugee teachers towards non-refugee teachers who have influence. We reminded the [nonrefugee teachers who were] trainers to tone it down but it is so natural for them to speak that way—this power differentiation provides a different dynamics in the training. [Question by focus group facilitator: How does this power differentiation affect the training?] The difference is really clearly seen. The effect is that it boosts the [nonrefugee teachers who were peer trainers'] confidence but it affects their peer who may not understand the material but are too afraid to ask.

The consultants were impressed by how many refugee teachers decided to conduct the training with their peers—14 of the peer trainers were refugees, in comparison to only four nonrefugee peer trainers.

As much as we had this ideal thing that we wanted to train both RT [refugee teachers] and NRT [nonrefugee teachers], so that they can continue to support each other and RT because of their high turnover, so we have NRTs who will be here and can continue this training—this was an ideal situation. It didn't seem to work out that way. What surprised me was that in spite of the RT situation they have a hard life and things working against them and yet they are the ones who are so excited/committed to training other teachers. Whereas those who [are not refugees] have higher qualification and speak better English, have more resources, they are the ones who drop us.

They thought it was very effective to have the peer training conducted in the peer trainees' native language, but it was hard for the consultants to feel like they could judge intervention fidelity when it was in a different language than their own. The consultants also thought that the peer trainers and trainees all walked

away from the trainings with a clear understanding of the take-home messages, if not the technical details of how exactly to implement a time-out, for example. The consultants described their consultees' improvement as an "attitude shift," from more teacher centered to student centered.

I was quite impressed—even though the specific tools/skills they may be still fumbling but the concept of it, the take home message—they get it. For example, knowing that I must take care of myself, the positive student relationship, empathy—it is an attitude shift which is much harder to achieve compared to I just learnt this. The specific tool they can take some time to practice and achieve that competency but the foundational aspect of it was good.

Regarding their own growth, consultants liked adapting the training material and doing more research on the topics themselves before delivering it, rather than delivering a canned manual: "Also the fact that we were part of developing the content, I think that helps with knowing our stuff. If we took someone else content, it would be harder to train." Another commented: "I learnt a lot during the process. For example, the training content, I was not familiar and when we were reworking that, we understand it on a deeper level."

The consultants thought they needed more time to build relationships with their consultees/peer trainers. The consultants also thought that the trainers/trainees were too scared to receive in-class consultation on their own classroom management. Perhaps, first having a couple months of consultation in class with each peer trainer, helping them gain confidence in their mastery of the skills learned in training, and then helping the peer trainers implement the peer training would have been better. One consultant said: "I think we need to relate with them better. I think the relationship needs to be deeper. I don't know how they feel about us being there to watch them do it." Another commented: "If someone actually has the luxury of time, it is actually better to give 2–3 months to do the mentoring [in-class classroom management consultation] first before we start talking about how to do training." Regarding in-class consultation being rejected by the peer trainers:

Also for the in-class consultation, I wonder if it is a cultural thing that they don't ask for help. I wonder if peer trainees will ask their fellow peers for help? Right now there is in-class consultations as trainers will monitor their assistant teachers in the classroom.

In summary, the consultants thought the peer trainers benefited from their training and follow-up consultation in terms of an "attitude shift" about classroom management, empathy, and self-care, but consultants were burned out by the end of the process and were concerned that they had difficulty judging peer trainer implementation fidelity.

Reflections

The first half of this article addressed lessons learned from the perspective of the first author, as an American entering a country with the purpose of establishing

consultation research. Some of the lessons learned in the first half of the article included the importance of theory and careful decision making when choosing a country and with whom you work. Theoretical models can be a necessary guide and grounding when in new research terrain. I also learned that culture shock can be a significant phenomenon that deserves slowing down, support, and coping skills. Country entry often involves the consultant being unaware of how much she does not know about the new culture. The rewarding feelings and relationships one builds are remarkable and unique to working in a global context. As with most consultation, it is necessary to look for client strengths, or country, local, and nonprofit organization strengths, especially those to which one may be blind. There are many challenges in consultation research abroad, and it is easy to not see the challenges coming or understand the whole range of solutions to the challenges. Cultural brokers, local colleagues, and supports are necessary to problem solve. While there may not be official school regulatory oversight groups, it is important to look for the unofficial oversight groups. Cultural brokers, such as local university colleagues, and people close to you, such as your family, can help bring you back to reality after facing challenges.

In the second half of this article, we reported the essential feedback we obtained from the consultants, peer trainers, and peer trainees after our refugee-teacher-train-refugee-teacher consultation. This feedback process and lessons learned could be applied to much international consultation research. Refugee teachers argued that for this intervention to be sustainable, it would require more refugee school and institutional support, from administrators of schools but also from UNHCR. Self-care was also deemed essential to be included in the training of refugee teachers. The feedback results were striking in revealing how consultants worked and felt burned out. This held implications for our role as principal investigators of the study. We learned that we need to pace our future studies and consultants at a slower, more humane pace. Finally, it was hard to engage more stressed communities such as Rohingya, who have been shunted from many countries and then stuck in Malaysia for generations without being accepted as citizens or resettled to a safer country by UNHCR. They can be especially hard to reach and understandably reluctant to trust others. Our limitation was that our colleagues had better connections among Christian refugee schools than among Muslim Rohingya refugee schools. We will have to consider how we can reach out to the Rohingya and other hard-to-reach refugee groups better.

Consultation models and the global consultation process

In their feedback, the consultants described their consultees' improvement as an "attitude shift," which we interpreted as resembling a "shift in conceptualization" similar to mental health, consultee-centered consultation. Such a shift in consultee conceptualization is seen as the key ingredient for the consultee to change her behavior or classroom climate (e.g., Lambert, Hylander, & Sandoval, 2004). In

addition, our training/consultation approach falls under the umbrella of Schein's (2010) "purchase of expertise" model, but using a PCSC model as our primary consultation model shifted the nature of Schein's traditional expertise that is "purchased" to knowledge that is co-acquired and shared by and with this study's partners and refugee teachers as peer trainers.

We have now completed multiple iterations of the RRE intervention using a PCSC approach. A PCSC model begs the question of whether the RRE intervention was a Western-imposed model assessed by Western metrics. While we made our best efforts to culturally adapt the existing U.S.-based classroom management intervention through pilot, culture-specific research, an ecological approach, and multiple intervention iterations, we acknowledge that many clearly Western-developed classroom strategies and approaches remain in RRE. So, it is possible that some teachers experienced the intervention content or delivery as foreign or judgmental, as if from a superior Western attitude, although they did not report that feeling to us. Postintervention focus groups, by contrast, indicated that the Western part of the intervention model (e.g., positive discipline) was welcomed by many. Postconflict refugee teachers are unique in that they fled a regime or conflict for a safer life with more freedom, often in hopes of eventual Western resettlement. In feedback interviews, some of these teachers explained that their goal of Western resettlement motivated them to leave their country's traditional classroom management behind and embrace the new so they could be prepared to teach when, hopefully, resettled to the West.

Democratic education, power, and respect

A Burmese peer trainer who was a refugee talked to us about freedom of religion and speech, and she wanted to translate that newfound freedom into more choices and freedom of expression for her students, having now made the choice to leave Burma behind. The teacher seemed to be saying that she relied on this training to learn an explicit approach of giving new freedoms to her students, which Burma could not give. Repeatedly, we were struck by how teachers struggled with and typically embraced this question at our training/consultation interventions—how do I want to evolve myself and my students now that I have chosen to have more freedom of speech and religion? And, how do I deliver education with the fresh perspective of wanting to facilitate student choices, engagement, and freedom of expression? We will suffice it to say here that we have struggled, as researchers, consultants, intervention designers, and authors, with how much our Western, democracy-embracing values have biased our intervention content, delivery, message, and understanding of feedback group results, in addition to our power as researchers (Erchul & Raven, 1997; O'Neal et al., 2016). It is possible that we are placing too heavy an interpretation, or load, on these teachers' goals and critiques of education "back in Burma" due to our own implicit bias toward democratic, student-centered, and engaged education (Institute for Democratic Education in

America [IDEA], 2016). At the same time, we want to acknowledge how Burmese refugees who are teachers seem to want to shed, or counteract, the after-image of Burmese education, as they turn their sights on more distant resettlement shores, which may hold more freedom.

Another important theme delivered by refugee trainers was of respect they received from their Malaysian citizen consultants. Such an empowering relationship of respect may be necessary to help support a vulnerable refugee teacher, who is more familiar with Malaysian citizen disrespect and discrimination, to rise to a leadership role in education, such as the role of being a peer trainer (Boyd-Dimock & McGree, 1995). Sadly, a marginalized group of refugee teachers largely expected to be treated by Malaysian citizens as invisible, in a rude, threatening manner, or with violence, sanctioned by the harsh Malaysian policy toward refugees (Low et al., 2014). Consultants reported concerns about observing a power differential between nonrefugee peer trainers and their refugee trainees. Such power dynamics play into many aspects of refugee education and research (O'Neal et al., 2016), not to mention the power differential between the Malaysian citizen consultants and peer trainers who were refugees (Erchul & Raven, 1997). Such a power differential between citizens and refugees may, however, reflect the larger societal power differential in Malaysia of which refugee teachers seemed painfully aware.

Consultants reported in their feedback sessions that they felt burned out by the end of all the trainings and consultations they conducted. They seemed to imply that the next iteration of refugee teacher consultation should be a lighter load, and with that message, they were speaking to the leaders of the training, who were the two of us as coauthors of this article. Power permeates much of training and consultation, with us coauthors needing to shift in our own conceptualization of our roles in, perhaps, having pushed the consultants too hard with a rigorous training and consultation schedule. As leaders of the project, we, too, need to take stock of the many stresses of being a trainer/consultant, such as just the act of working with teachers who are refugees and learning about their lives, in addition to consultant roles of coordinating, organizing, traveling, and consulting in isolated, highly stressed community refugee schools.

Conclusions and implications

International consultation research can be both uniquely rewarding and challenging. Global consultation differs from consultation in one's own country in that the entry process is complex and the extensive network of trusting relationships necessary for such research can take years to establish. Once established, these relationships can build a small army with a similar mission to implement and evaluate multiple iterations of consultation interventions over time. In the end, global consultants will need to be open to unexpected populations in new countries, as we were with the hidden refugee educators in Malaysia, and they need to consider a long-term process involving multiple iterations and many

waves of feedback. Despite the many highs, lows, and long-term processes necessary to complete consultation research abroad, the potential rewards are many for our global society, mutual understanding, communities in need, and for one's growth as a researcher and consultant.

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