



University of Utah Bridging Borders Workshops

Ban Mai Nai Soi

Workshops Conducted – June 8 – 12, 2015

Summary Report – September 2015

Workshop Facilitators: Tom McFarland, Mailee Yang, Dane Hess, Yvette Melby & Rosemarie Hunter

Workshop Evaluation: Mary Beth Vogel-Ferguson & Ryan Burningham

Report submitted by Rosemarie Hunter & Trinh Mai

Schedule

Day 1: Introductions and Assessment

Combined groups (total 74 participants)

- Introductions & Ice Breaker
- Assessment of Camp Community Priorities with all partners
- Lunch
- Trauma Sensitive Yoga
- Stories of Health, Healing, and Empowerment



Day 2 Learning Through Play

& Classroom Climate

(Divided Groups: 12 participants from KnED SE and HSLP)

- Introductions: Ball of Yarn Activity – Identification of Connections, Networks, Support Systems
- Learning through Play (Part 1 – younger students) – Activity: Self Portraits
- Learning through Play: (Part 2 – pre-teens and adolescents) – Activities: Team Work with Building a Tower; Rewarding Positive Behavior; Identifying Cultural Games.
- Classroom Climate & Practical Tips for Behavior Management

- Building Self-confidence & Self-motivation – Activities: Playdoh exercise; Childhood Reflection Exercise; Role Play exercise
- Engaging families



Day 3: Developing Education Plans for Children with Special Needs

(Divided Groups: 12 participants from KnED SE and HSLP)

- Morning Yoga
- Review of Main Concepts from the Previous Day – Time for questions
- Defining the Education Plan & Monitoring Progress for Children with Special Needs
- Parenting and Communication – Activity: Balloon Game
- Lunch
- Shifting the Community's Views: Reducing the stigma around children with special needs in the community – Activities: Role Plays
- Dealing with Stress/Self Care (bio-psycho-social-spiritual assessments) – Activity: Development of Self Care Plans

Day 4: Engaging with Parents

(Divided Groups: 12 participants from KnED SE and HSLP)

- Relationships: How to build a friendly, trusting, close relationship between parents and children

- Parent Education Workshops: Games to Engage Parents – Activity: Charades
- Contracting with Students and Parents
- Evaluation and Suggestions for future workshops
- Graduation



Summary of Workshops

Presentations, activities, role-plays and discussions focused on the following five primary areas: *Learning through Play*, *Working with Children who have Special Needs*, *Communications Skills*, *Engaging with Parents*, and *Developing Plans for Self Care*. All activities focused on developing a team approach and incorporating peer supervision. Group activities included exercises focused on ways parents and teachers can work together to support youth. All activities were adaptable to work with youth and parents involved in special education and that could be adapted to do in the home.

Workshop materials and interactive exercises focused on skill building activities with regards to assessment, intervention, and educating and supporting families. Working as partners and in small groups, participants also discussed and performed role-play exercises focused on communication skills, working with parents, and empowering participants to develop solutions to common problems faced as HSLP or SE staff members.

In addition to these areas, activities were facilitated to encourage self-care of staff. The workshop facilitators provided trainings on bio-psycho-social-spiritual assessments.

Additionally, participants engaged in Yoga and learned how to do self-care by introducing beginner stretches, which targeted the lower back, but was not limited to it. Participants also developed personal self-care plans and shared strategies for implementation and consistency.

Participant engagement increased significantly over time. The group was quiet at first, however, as soon as the workshop facilitators began using active learning techniques (hands on activities, games, role plays), participants became animated and open to sharing. There was much fun and laughter throughout. Participants were active in providing group summaries and classroom presentations.

The most significant outcome we observed was participants' ability to identify solutions to common problems and share these solutions with their peers. There was a strong exchange of strengths-based and solution focused ideas.

Summary of Special Education Workshops and Consultations

The workshop participants requested information and trainings on *Special Education*, included the development of *Educational Plans*, *Working Parents and Dealing with the Stigma in the Community*. Participants were engaged in all aspects of these topics and were particularly interested in learning techniques for working with parents and teaching parents activities and games that can be done at home. Participants shared that there is much stigma in the community regarding special education and also much that is not known about these conditions. Generally, many community members do not understand disabilities and in some cases there are still some superstitions about why a child has special needs. Children with special needs also tend to have difficulty connecting with peers and are often socially isolated. However, participants also shared that parent involvement and encouragement can make a big difference in how the child sees themselves and their success at school. In terms of recommendations, the participants shared that they think parents would benefit from a respite program and support networks. This led to discussing examples of respite programs and peer support networks.

When asked how people in the community react or respond to children with special needs. Educators provided some of the following insights.

We have some people that respect and understand them and are willing to help; but there are also lots of people who make judgments, don't want to talk with them and don't like them; the people who know them like them but others don't understand

In school they (children with special needs) have a problem and people then send them you must go to an SE school – you cannot see or you cannot learn. They are separated from their friends; you are an SE student so you should not be friends with us

I know a family from my section that has 2 SE kids; one daughter is deaf – parents are embarrassed to take her out in public – the parents lock them in the home when they go to the farm don't let them out

I don't believe this but some people think that if people are deaf and dumb it means they took advantage of other people in their past life. Maybe they cheated people out of things in the past.

A family where a kids fell from a tree and broke his leg; he forgot himself for 2 weeks; they send him to school, give him encouragement, parents know he needs more help so they stay by him all the time; they give him encouragement to read and study for his tests, he passed the test; has a lot of parent support



Reflection and Feedback on Special Education Workshops: Tom McFarland

During the time I was leading or participating in the scheduled trainings, I offered to serve as a special education consultant to Yonal—the Program Manager of Special Education and the Home School Liaison Program—for Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS)—and Poe, the Program Manager of Special Education—for the Karenni Education Department (KnED).

We first met for two hours as scheduled with the three Coordinators of Special Education for the KnED who were participating in the training to discuss writing Individual

Education Plans (IEPs) and to examine some previously written IEPs. Because these Coordinators find IEP writing to be challenging, we later met for an hour to watch a SE class with four students. I provided suggestions on how to teach these students and feedback on their likely labels in the US. In addition, I modeled a lesson on how to teach colors, numbers and shapes to these students. I explained how an IEP teaching these concepts would be written focusing on the goals and ways of measuring. Yonal and I met together to discuss how to change some of the focus from academic to functional learning for the observed students.

Poe and I met occasionally while waiting for training, and I share several simple ideas with him about how to improve the SE Program in the camp. He shared that other consultants have indicated that the SE Program at Camp One is considered an exemplary program within the refugee camps in Thailand.

I would summarize my experiences as positive and interesting. I especially like the trainings led by others—and the Yoga.



Additional Topics Identified by Participants

At the end of the trainings, we spent some time identifying additional topics for future workshops. The participants provided the following feedback.

How do we engage with the parents when they are neglecting their children and not taking care of them; maybe they are involved with substances and not paying attention to the needs of their children; what can we do?

Problem in the community – the community is not talking good to the kids – talking bad things to the kids the adults are teaching the kids bad words so kids

don't have respect for the adults and the adults don't have respect for the kids and treat them as second class citizens.

Could we get some handouts in Burmese? Things that we could read at home and review anytime; put together a resource manual in Burmese; a place to write notes and make part of it in English as well so we can learn English as well

YOGA!!!! Learn to play games;

Gives us some idea if what to do if we see the parents beat their kids.

Trainers also provided feedback and identified the following additional topics

It would be helpful to bring a special education person next year to continue the work that the group started this year. Particularly, being available for classroom observation and working with teachers in the classroom, as well as home visits.

The participants did mention an interest in child welfare training for next time. They also expressed an ongoing interest in communication skills training.

Representatives from the host agencies (International Rescue Committee – IRC and Jesuit Refugee Services – JRS) were also asked to identify training needs for health care workers and educators. The representatives all indicated that turnover of personnel in the camp is very high and that reinforcing the same topics that had been presented would be fine, despite concerns that training might be repetitive or not as effective because of short time limits. Other suggestions included:

New staff replacements are often less trained and sometimes very young. It is hard for them to garner respect. Giving them tools to improve their skills is very helpful.

It is time for renewal training on why it is so helpful to have children in SE. This used to be higher and has gone down.

Cross training between groups; psycho social workers are really short staffed; so little between the groups; turnover is high everywhere.

Looking at opportunities for applied skills. Perhaps spending more time in the classroom. Do one-on-one training with individuals. Possibly provide a pediatric OT to be able to learn how to help an individual child. Perhaps get specific cases to us ahead a time and see what kind of a team or help from a team member could be added.

Provide Written Material

One of the most consistent requests was to have written materials available during the trainings and that could be left with participants. The trainers, the camp participants, and Camp NGO staff noted this. Additionally the translators wished for the material ahead of time to aid in translating.

It was commonly agreed that the materials needed to contain simple ideas but also the main points of the trainings so it would serve as an outline of things to remember. One

idea was to have the handouts in English on one side and Burmese on the other. Additionally, written materials would also support the “train the trainer” model so participants would have materials to use to pass on the knowledge to others.

Increase Interaction with Participants in their Environment (Schools, Clinics)

Several suggestions from both participants and facilitators focused on the desire to see the participants in action and hear their challenges in their place of work. This might involve asking participants to provide actual case studies to discuss and apply principles to a case. Additionally, participants suggested that workshop facilitators see them in the classroom and provide consultations afterwards. Below are a few examples.

More classroom observations or home visits where appropriate. Maybe a half day training...and half day doing applied work in the classroom setting or in the clinic. Or perhaps alternate training and applied work.

Idea for next year doing some accompanying of people doing the training to support them and doing some case planning to help with specific situations.

A couple of topics explored and applied deeply and with hands activities where they work.

Camp Climate: Observations and Reflection

The word “unsettled” is one way to describe what is happening as a result of several significant realities being experienced by camp residents at this time. Talk of repatriation is growing and resettlement is occurring at a slower pace than in the past. Some suggest this reality has increased feelings of being hemmed in with few opportunities and fear of the unknown future. Turnover in camp staff employed by the NGO’s is high due to resettlement or simply returning to Burma (Myanmar). Informally, camp residents and staff say they see more alcohol and other drug abuse, as sometimes happens when individuals experience extended periods of stress, uncertainty and the lack of ability to control their future. Some camp leaders worry that many people have no experience of a world outside the camp. The wonder if in their naïveté they could be taken advantage of and exploited.

Participants spoke of significant cultural shifts in the community, as some parents feel that the stress of camp living is taking a toll over time and some are less able to care for their children. As one participant noted about changes in some parents’ behaviors:

A problem in the community; the community is not talking good to the kids; talking bad things to the kids the adults are teaching the kids bad words so kids don’t have respect for the adults and the adults don’t have respect for the kids and treat them as second class citizens.

Many of those living in the camp are also resilient survivors of many forms of persecution. This shows through an expanding interest and drive towards employment certificates and personal development. There is also increasing freedom of movement, more opportunities for jobs outside the camp, leading to more money for some.

As the outside world continues to enter the camp through media sources, the desire for connecting with outside grows as well. Already resettled family members send back remittance money, and stories of life in more developed countries. Many expressed appreciation that someone from “outside” cares and wants to help. They liked asking us questions and learning about our world.

Acknowledgements

We greatly appreciate the opportunity to visit Ban Mai Nai Soi and want to thank the JRS and IRC staff members who supported our work with their time in staying in communication to identify workshop topics and guide the development of the training schedule. In addition, we send our heartfelt thanks to all the staff that supported us inside the camp; they were our constant companions and guides, providing high quality translation and cultural consultation in order that we could continually adapt our materials in ways that were culturally relevant. JRS and IRC staff members were extremely gracious with their time and support. Their knowledge, experience, and assistance were crucial to the success of these workshops. We greatly value their expertise and are inspired by their passion and commitment to the refugee community. We look forward to feedback from the staff and the participants regarding areas that were well received, as well as, suggestions for improvement.

