Derina Johnson - PhD Researcher

"Trying to close the gap from research to practice: a case example from the Thailand-Burma border"

General Development Panel Presentation

DSAI Bridging the Gap - Translating Development Research into Practice

Dublin, 28 November 2014

PhD Supervisor: Professor Robbie Gilligan

School of Social Work and Social Policy

children's research centre
research for children & young people

Context: A PhD Study

- Qualitative case study of the **educational and employment** related **experiences, choices and strategies** of a sample of **displaced and undocumented** young migrants from **Burma** living in northwest Thailand

- Researcher: lived and worked with study community for three years.

  - Ethical and moral obligation to relevant translatable research

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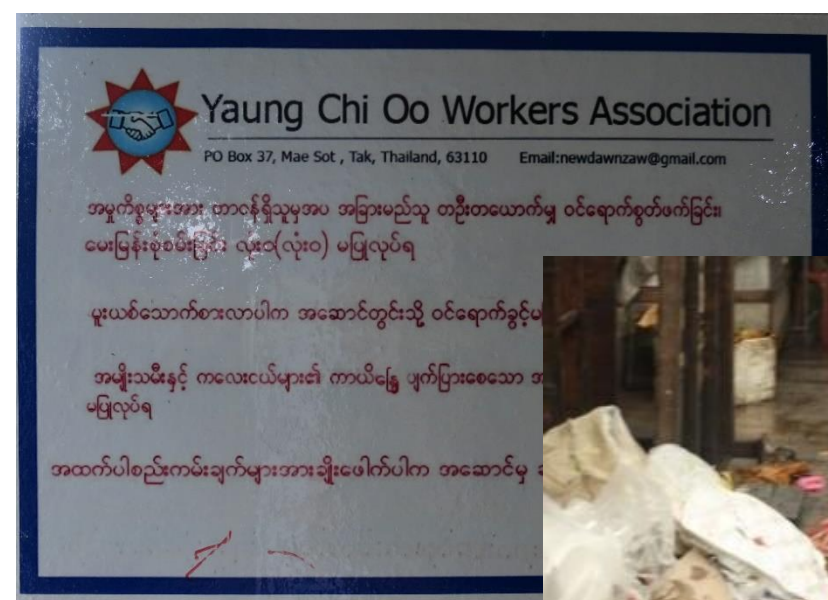
The problem

- Tendency for research to discount practice and for practice to discount the potential value of research

(Rosenfeld & Chaskin, 2008)

- Researchers often think theoretical rather than practical

(Heron & Reason, 2010)

- Assumed process of 'Enlightenment'…"authoritative knowledge will prevail"

(Stone, Maxwell & Keating, 2001)

Bridging the Gap

- **The acknowledgement:** Research is more than an opportunity to build knowledge, but an opportunity to contribute in concrete ways to action

  (Rosenfeld & Chaskin, 2008)

- **The challenge:** "limited understanding"… "no systematic understanding of what, when, why and how" (Chaskin & Rosenfeld, 2008, p. 4, Court & Young, 2003, p. vii)

- **The response:** a range of 'conditioning factors' which can promote putting research findings to use

  (Chaskin and Rosenfeld, 2008)

Bridging the Gap

1. centrality of **relationships and effective interactions** among researchers and "users" (policymakers, practitioners, and others);

2. awareness of and **sensitivity** to the different **interests, values, priorities, pressures, and understandings** held by the range of relevant actors;

3. **complex dynamics** that inhere in the **institutional contexts** in which the various stakeholders work

– (Chaskin, 2008, p. 139)

My early-stage efforts to foster fertile conditions for future knowledge utilisation in my field site

- (re)Establishing a **role and relationships** *with* the community
  - *Through reconnecting with previous networks and redefining role*

- Establishing receptiveness to study/findings, a '**shared vision**'
  - *Through consultation process: presentation, key informant interviews*

- Establishing effective **communication**
  - *Through identified point persons*

(1) The Researcher Role: "Returning to us"

- **Task:** Reinforcing researcher role

- **Formal actions:** Informing Community Ethics Advisory Board

- **Informal actions:** TCD business cards, introductions
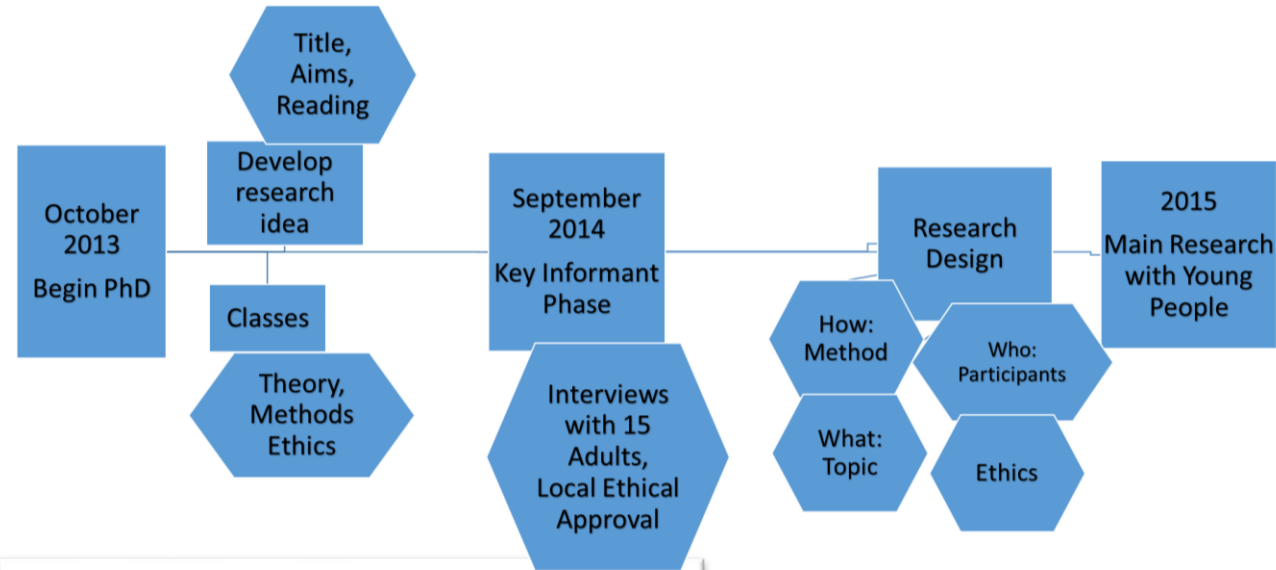
(2) Fostering receptiveness

- **Task:**
  - Raise awareness of and interest in study
  - Cultivate recognition of relevance of study and potential findings to community

- **Formal actions:** 20 key informant interviews, snowball sampling > extending network

- **Informal actions:** working from cafes/offices, lunches/coffees, ongoing contact while not in Thailand (e.g. Facebook)

(3) Promoting communication

- ▪ Identification of **point persons**
  - • Advisor, decision maker, established/influential in community, English speaker
    - – "a kind of **broker and supporter of the research**, facilitate broader institutional buy-in and a sense of responsibility for and commitment to the process and its outcomes" (Chaskin, 2008, p. 146)

- ▪ **Local interpreter** acts as **liaison with community** while I am in Ireland
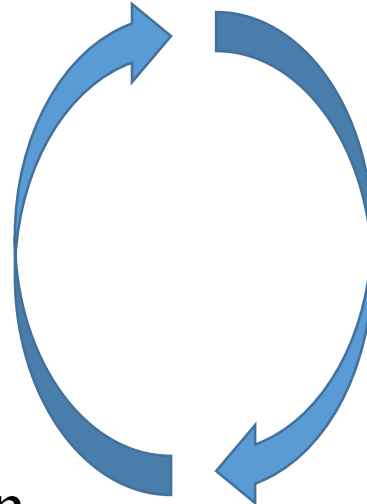 - • To facilitate ongoing communication and address queries (Kim, 2010)
  - • Confidentiality agreement, sanctioned by ethics board, participants informed before involvement (Kumar, 1989)

From research to practice – early stage efforts

Three Processes

- Establishing Role

- Establishing receptiveness

- Establishing communication

Formal & Informal Actions

- Community Advisory Board

- Key Informant Interviews

- Business cards

- Ongoing contact

- Organisational Point Persons

- Interpreter Liaison

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The results of these efforts are yet to unfold…

Thank you

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