



My Education Enlightenment at the Malaysian Social Research Institute

PRIMARY, SECONDARY, AND ADULT ENGLISH EDUCATION AT THE MSRI – KUALA LUMPUR

JULY 30, 2016

Restructuring an Education System and My Own Work Habits at MSRI

by Kimberly Copeland, UVic CAPI Intern

I will be the first person to admit that I have no previous experience in teaching or being involved in the process of creating educational experiences. I am someone who spends a lot of time working alone on university papers or co-op work projects titled 'program manual project coordinator'. This job description is the epitome of isolation and solitary work. The idea of being cooped up in a small cubicle writing alone (complete with headphones and a coffee) sounds like paradise to me.

I shudder at the idea of 'group projects' and public speaking opportunities in school courses make me want to hit the 'web drop' button on UVic registration as fast as humanly possible. I state all of this in the opening paragraph of my third CAPI blog post so that you will hopefully understand how delightful and at times difficult this past month at the Malaysian Social Research Institute (MSRI) has been for myself.

CAPI placements are allocated based on the skilled mathematical algorithms and scientific surveying of Robyn and Cate.

From looking around at my CAPI colleagues and their various placements, it is amazing to see how each intern is almost perfectly placed into each NGO (and given the circumstances – probably living together – hopefully in a relative state of harmony). My placement here at MSRI was under a unique set of circumstances that could not have worked out better for myself.

I have been extremely lucky to have had the opportunity to meet each of this year's interns at the CAPI Pre-Departure Orientation Week.

My advice to future CAPI Interns is this: *make sure that you get to know these frightened and excited people around you during this crucial time!* These wonderful people – Joel and Zach in particular – use their sense of humour as a coping mechanism and an art form. I sincerely hope that each CAPI intern employs at least one pal in a buddy system (or as UVic calls it: student networking and relationship-building). Make sure that you have those people's backs and they have yours. If things become difficult

and you need to run something past a friend and make sure that you are not over-reacting or 'under-reacting' to certain situations that arise at work, with housing, with the people in your life in your new experience. My humble advice is that you need to have people in your life that are rooting in your corner (and are great at legitimizing your thoughts and concerns).

Photo below: Zachary, Joel and myself in a CNG: a mode of transport much like a zippy three-wheeled golf cart.



I suppose the point that I am trying to articulate is this: even if you are used to working on your own or making decisions solely based on your own judgement, working in a group and watching other people contribute to a common goal is incredible to be a part of.

Here is a list of things that I have found to be beneficial thus far to new work and experiences under the CAPI Program:

- ➔ Do not go into a new work environment thinking that you will pick up everything in a day or two.
- ➔ It is a wonderful thing to ask for help or explanation.
- ➔ Asking questions and keeping open and honest communication with coworkers and supervisors is one of the best methods to gain work experience, voice your opinion, and join work groups.

- ➔ CAPI 'busywork' is notorious and incredibly real. Be prepared to work on almost everything under the sun – if it feels appropriate and safe.
- ➔ Do not have any work expectations or requirements for the type of work that will be conducted at your organization. Some of my favourite moments that I have been privileged to at MSRI are the strangest, random ones.
- ➔ Learning the work dynamics and relationship of the organization is crucial.
- ➔ An internship experience like this only happens once (if you are lucky) and you should take every single opportunity to learn in any capacity you can and to help in any way that you can.
- ➔ We are younger than we think and therefore, we do not have the entrenched 'work style' or 'habits' that we think we do.

A lot of the points I have listed above regarding approaches to new 'work' are parallel to beginning a new that students face – especially in the context of arriving to a new country (such as Malaysia) when they attend the MSRI Sahabat Support Centre.

LAUNCH OF THE SCC SCHOOL CENTRE: JANUARY 2011
Photo credit: MSRI Organization Website



www.msri.org.my

Collaborative Education and Community-Building in the Context of the Malaysian Social Research Institute

The Malaysian Social Research Institute provides case management, legal services, medical consultation and counselling and education (kindergarten, primary and secondary as well as adult English education) to refugees that currently reside in Malaysia.

The Sahabat Support Centre (SSC) began in January 2011 to provide services to refugees from small minority communities predominately from the Middle East and Africa including: Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, Sudan and Nigeria.

In the last five years, there is been a large increase of refugee children and unaccompanied minors that are seeking the services of MSRI. Approximately 30% of the refugee population that MSRI provides services to are under the age of

eighteen. Some families face poverty and hardship under these circumstances. MSRI provides honest and helpful advice, care and provisions every Friday through an event called 'Open Day' where refugees can make appointments to speak with interpreters and qualified counsellors and MSRI management staff. I have not had the change to shadow an Open Day yet, but I have heard from the other fantastic and brilliant MSRI interns Danae and Claire that the experience is humbling and incredibly insightful into the 'big picture' of dedication and services that MSRI provides.

I work almost directly for the wonderful, hilarious and empowering Andrea Fernandez, the School Manager of MSRI Sahabat Support Centre School. In the month that I have interned here, she has already taught me so much about education and inspired me to be more active in seeking projects that involve group work and the merit and meaning behind a multiplicity of different viewpoints.

Andrea is an amazing person for many reasons but the most impressive trait I find is her ability to find humour again in every situation (the good, bad, and ugly). She is patient somehow with the students, the parents and even the teachers of the school and that takes dedication.

I have been working on a lot of liaison between the primary and secondary school teachers and the school management. Almost every day, I sit down with the teachers and work on editing the upcoming school schedule, the daunting curriculum changes, the education budget (as MSRI prepares for more fundraising requests to donors and stakeholders), building and supplies inventory and lastly cleaning and moving. Did I mention that the MSRI school is moving buildings and completing extensive renovations that *need to be finished at the very latest* by August 21st. Of this year. And school begins the following day.

MSRI Education: My Experience

As MSRI prepares for the move, reopening, and new school semester, more and more interns, volunteers, staff members and teachers will be jumping on board and joining in to help out as they can. This includes renovations to the new school building; taking down decorations and artwork of the old building; packing up and going through supplies and equipment; and the move itself. This is a fairly daunting endeavor giving that MSRI is also preparing all of the revision and administration for the 2016-2017 school year.

You would think that staff and teachers would be stressed and overwhelmed but everyone is excited and eager to help in any way that they can. Some of the young students and unaccompanied minors have visited the MSRI office and offered to help. Teachers work late revising curriculums and requesting materials and photocopies to be prepared. It is clear to me that the opening of the new school is a true labour of community-building and love.

I remember something that has stuck with me from the conversations coming out of the CAPI Pre-Departure Orientation week. Emma - currently teaching at the Karenni Social Development Centre – mentioned that a situation that we would have to deal

with is the notion that we as CAPI interns are simply “walking into our internship organization” without a background knowledge on the work relationships, environment, or expectations. I think the best way to participate in the projects, programs, and activities that our CAPI intern organizations host is to listen, prepare, be interested and engage and ask not only for help but asking to help the people we are working around. I have gained so much more of an understanding about the Malaysian Social Research Institute, my relationship building skills, and myself.

Photos of my Favourite Moments at MSRI and KL

Top: Danae, Claire, Margot (honorary CAPI intern) and I posing in the gardens of the home of one of the nine sultan's of Malaysia to celebrate Hari Raya.

Bottom left: The view of Ampang Waterfront on our daily walk to MSRI



Bottom Middle: Lia Syed (Executive Director of MSRI), Omar, Andrea, Yati and myself all taking turns cutting the cake for our July birthday celebration.

Bottom Right: Amazing feast of dates, desserts, rice, curries at an Eid celebration.

