

Using Action Research to explore the Role of the International Academic Consultant: Drawing on Participants' Perceptions in a Teacher Development Project in Pakistan

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Introduction

This paper considers the involvement of the UK academic consultant in professional development projects among teachers in a developing, low-income nation. It challenges the assumption that the international academic consultant is the best person to bring about effective learning and teaching among teachers in low-income nations. The context for this exploration was a four-year project in Pakistan named by its Pakistani originators as 'Trust for the Advancement of Knowledge and Education' (TAKE) in which UK consultants from UCL Institute of Education, London University, led bi-annual development conferences with the principal and senior teachers of private schools in Pakistan. As a UK university lecturer who specialises in learning and teaching, I was one of its consultants. This paper reports on action research into this work.

Having provided keynote inputs at the TAKE conferences in March 2012 and again in March 2013, I was inspired to investigate whether international consultant inputs were the most valuable for supporting teachers' professional development in Pakistan. I ~~happened to notice~~ noticed some comments made on evaluation forms at the 2013 conference, which suggested that there was resentment among participants at the use of international consultants, rather than local ones, and that the presentation methods used at the conference were too 'academic' and not sufficiently practical ~~enough~~. Investigations into perceptions among participants of the role of international and academic consultants therefore seemed essential.

These investigations would constitute data for reflection on my practice of international consultancy in Pakistan particularly. The study also had relevance more generally exploring

what it is that sustains the model of UK (or other international) consultants being paid by low-income countries for teachers' development there. The research aimed to investigate those aspects of consultancy that local participants valued particularly about the UK consultant in comparison with a local consultant. It also explored those aspects that they found irrelevant or inappropriate. The study aimed to challenge an assumption that is frequently made, both in the rich and less well-off countries of the world, that buying in the international consultant is the best solution to perceived development needs among teachers.

Assumptions behind international consultancies

In the west, 'international' consultancy often equates with increasing funding streams, especially in times of economic recession (Maringe, Foskett & Woodfield 2013). From the perspective of a commercial outlook on 'internationalising' education, Britain has a particular dimension to its identity as a colonial power, because in the past 500 years Britain colonised many countries for its own commercial gain, including Pakistan (then part of India) until 1947 (Iyer 2009; Shukla 1996). It ruled as a superior power over a subordinated people in those times. This image of the British as a 'superior' force in the hierarchy of authority and wealth might still be at the back of some Pakistani people's consciousness when they encounter UK consultants during professional development conferences. The effects of this image need to be explored and their implications for genuinely valuable teacher development analysed.

A complicating factor for post-colonial states such as Pakistan is the prevalence of English as a western language of business. Phillipson has dubbed this prevalence 'linguistic imperialism' (Phillipson in Selvi 2010, 157). Shin and Kubota (2008, 207) have noted 'the perpetual (neo)colonial dominance of English in the current context of globalization'. Manathunga (2006) illustrated how such dominance pervades the academic metaphors used by university academics too. This puts tension on independent states such as Pakistan, seeking to assert

their own culturally embedded practices. This tension underpins many efforts to introduce western educational methods into low or middle-income countries' government schools. In employing UK consultants, the Pakistani network sustains the emphasis on the English language, as do the private schools in Pakistan generally, and thus perhaps makes wider participation more difficult. The network has sought to enhance the education of those students who can pay for their schooling, by importing academic consultants from elite international universities.

Pakistan as the context for Teacher Professional Development (TPD)

The term Teacher Professional Development spans a spectrum of opportunities for teachers to develop professionally. 'TPD' denotes the learning of those who are already teachers, in this case mainly senior or principal teachers, who wish to improve their expertise as teachers or teacher-trainers. I distinguish this from initial teacher education in which the teacher has no teaching experience. However, in countries like Pakistan where practising teachers are not necessarily qualified to teach, this distinction can become blurred. I have chosen in this research to focus on TPD which is effective in terms of pupil learning. However, by 'learning' I mean the holistic processes and experiences of learning, not just exclusively their outcomes, and the learning of all, not just those labelled as most 'able' or most likely to 'benefit' from further schooling. I also make no assumptions about how directly student learning may be affected by teachers' learning: sometimes the influence on students is a subtle, unobservable and long-term process of mutual relationship among teachers and students (Postholm 2013; Villegas-Reimers 2003). TPD in Pakistan has no obvious niche: in schools it depends to a large extent on the outlook of the principal (see also Razzaque and Magno in Magno regarding leadership development in Pakistan, 2014). This was partly why TAKE invited principal and senior teachers in preference over classroom teachers to its conferences. Illahi (2016, p.2) has

claimed that over 40,000 teachers are trained every year in Pakistan. However, he cites Khan (2011) in suggesting that training there can often suffer from:

1. Being knowledge based not application based
2. Participants' being focused on passing exams for certification rather than training for its own sake
3. The need for memorization to succeed in the examination
4. Poorly qualified trainers.

In the following sections I refer to some features which are considered in much internationally available literature as essential for the success of TPD in terms of holistic benefits to students' learning (Earley and Porritt 2010; Hawley and Valli 1999; McKenzie and Santiago 2005; Schwille and Dembele 2007; Stoll et al 2006). It is notable, however, that such literature itself has tended to be based in western countries such as UK, USA, Australia and Scandanavia and few such resources stem from Pakistan. As Aslam and Atherton (2013) have pointed out, the situation in Pakistan is different because of the large scale private tutoring industry as well as many economic factors. Westernised though that literature may be, however, the four features often associated with valuable TPD might be summarised as:

- 1) Participants of TPD identify their needs for the form and the content of their own professional learning, as far as is feasible given previous experience;
- 2) Participants of TPD reflect, talk, inquire and challenge each other collaboratively, within and/or across institutions, often in Learning Communities;
- 3) The school institution, especially its leadership, makes space and gives support to those who are learning; and

4) Although the main site for school teachers' learning is the school, some input for learning needs to come from beyond the institution, from experienced educators within the geographical area or beyond; from practitioner bodies or from academic bodies such as universities.

I used these four features as one framework for making this reflective investigation and its analysis. Participants' desire for self-direction, collaboration and collaborative inquiry as key ingredients of TPD were issues that were repeatedly described by respondents.

Principals' (and heads of departments') perceptions of promoting professional development in their schools was particularly important in the Pakistani context, given that principals/heads had responsibility for other teachers' development more than any other nominated people. In a previous, in-service education project in Pakistan, which aimed to develop teachers to use more participative classroom styles and whose consultants worked with teachers to diversify their teaching, it became clear that sometimes, school-based, reflective action was hampered by the school principals themselves, who saw the innovative teachers as a threat (Shamim and Halai 2006, 62). Moreover, in the same project one teacher stated that:

Once my students were busy in discussion and there was noise in the class, the head entered the class and scolded the students about discipline and asked me to stop this game and start to teach as before (cited in Dean 2006, 97).

Because the TAKE conferences included principals, we were able to address directly the role of principals in avoiding those limitations to exploring student-centred teaching approaches.

Research design

Approach

My approach to making this investigation was action research in that it aimed to help ‘unshackle people from the constraints of irrational and unjust structures that limit self-development and self-determination’ (Carr and Kemmis 1986, 162). This research was based on Carr and Kemmis’ model of action research, defined as:

A form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which these practices are carried out (1986, 162).

Action research involves a series of repeating cycles: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Carr & Kemmis 1986, 162). The conclusions from the reflecting cycle are used to address the original question and the cycle is repeated again, which is ongoing. This type of action research is generally known as action-reflection and the cycle continues until ‘... we feel things are satisfactory, [and] that point itself raises new questions and it is time to begin again’ (McNiff & Whitehead 2005, 10). Mcniff & Whitehead (2005, 8) saw such research as a ‘powerfully liberating form of professional enquiry because it means that the practitioners themselves investigate their practices as they find ways to live more fully in the direction of their educational values’.

In the current research project, my professional work as international consultant during the two latter years of TAKE conferences was the focus of inquiry (divided here into CYCLES 1, 2 and 3 of the project). My over-arching research question was: *What was the value of my work as international academic consultant in providing professional development for teaching and learning in Pakistan?*

The data collection methods were themselves an innovative mix of face to face and online inquiries, necessitated both by finances and by geographical distance. Interviewing would have been a more natural approach because of the interpretivist stance of the research which sought participants' perspectives rather than information *per se*. The research, however, took an interpretivist-realist approach, exploring in as much depth as possible the responses of 121 Pakistani educator respondents, who belonged to the TAKE network of schools and who chose to undertake professional development. In keeping with an interpretivist paradigm, I hoped through this research to understand in some detail the realities of individual Pakistani educators as they related to TPD and experienced or perceived the international academic consultant's role within that. At the same time, I sought to unravel layers of reality as they perceived it and also to contextualise this within the geographical, historical and cultural context of their practice as well as my own (Alderson 2013).

Project background

TAKE [Trust for the Advancement of Knowledge and Education] was initiated as a result of liaison between colleagues at the UCL Institute of Education and three Pakistani educators, one a retired general and the others the principals of international schools in Karachi. Given the low status of professional development of teachers in Pakistan at the time, the Trust aspired to raise its profile by inspiring schools and teachers to invest in it. Initially the Trust shipped out two academic-practitioners from UCL Institute of Education, to lead seminars about learning and assessment respectively. This model soon appeared to be too passive for the participants, so a more participatory approach was enacted. From 2011, twice per year in October and March, TAKE therefore hosted a three day conference called TAKE Time Out at which academic-practitioners from UCL Institute of Education, UK, were invited to provide formal input in the shape of several keynote addresses; although in the revised format,

discussion and networking among participants were emphasised as important aspects of the conference too.

Data collection

My research question was: *What was the value of my work as international academic consultant in providing professional development for teaching and learning in Pakistan?*

Sub-questions included:

How did participants perceive the international academic consultant?

How valuable did participants rate the consultancy to be for teaching and learning?

How did the consultancy's value relate to the international, academic status of the consultant?

There were three distinct cycles of data collection as follows.

1. CYCLE 1: open-ended questionnaire email responses from 70 TAKE conference past participants;

This cycle fed into the planning and execution of the next conference:

2. CYCLE 2: participation and inputs by 70 delegates and consultants at the TAKE conference of March 2014;

This cycle fed into the planning and execution of the next stage of research:

3. CYCLE 3: open-ended questionnaire email responses from 51 participants of the March 2014 conference [CYCLE 2].

This cycle fed into the planning and execution of a potential subsequent conference.

CYCLE 1. The TAKE conference of 2013 and subsequent feedback

A few weeks after the March 2013 TAKE conference, I wrote to all participants individually and asked their views about that event.

CYCLE 1 included questions on the respondents' perceptions about the following: *how interested teachers were in developing their practice; purposes for schooling in Pakistan; the role of universities in supporting TPD in Pakistan; Pakistan's relationship with the UK generally; impact of using UK presenters at Pakistani teacher development events; most useful aspects of TAKE conferences; and preparation they were prepared to do before conferences.*

I received nine individual responses and so then invited all teachers at the subsequent October 2013 TAKE conference to fill in detailed evaluation forms answering the same questions (although I did not attend this latter conference in person). Participants were informed about the purpose of these detailed evaluations and the research project as a whole, and were very willing to provide comments.

Seventy sets of written comments were collected (n=70), including the original nine, which addressed some or all of ten open-ended questions, and which were returned by email by the end of autumn 2013. The sample consisted of staff from private schools in Pakistan as follows: 8.5% principals, 38% heads of department, 40% other teachers while the rest were registered as 'administrators'.

Analysis consisted of a form of grounded theory in that themes were sought and coded in response to the open questions (Charmaz 2012) all of which were based on the theoretical framework of this research relating to the use of the international consultant carrying out effective TPD in Pakistan.

CYCLE 2. TAKE conference of 2014

In March 2014, a new form of TAKE conference was held on the basis of participants' comments during CYCLE 1 and with a particular emphasis on local action and on (principal) teachers' promotion of student-centred, self-directed learning and teaching in the classroom.

This comprised CYCLE 2 of the research project. For two days, groups of participants presented the 'action research' they had carried out in their classrooms in advance, while the rest of the attendees listened and asked questions. 'Action research' was used in its loosest sense in describing these projects (Argyris 1990). Prior to the conference, participants received a guidance pack in which, through email from the UK, they were guided on how to carry out any one of four classroom 'action research' activities, on which they could then report at the conference. Topics were based on preferences gleaned in the questionnaire responses from CYCLE 1. The activities in CYCLE 2 therefore promoted teachers' Assessment for Learning to support student-centred and self-directed teaching and learning, including:

- feedback;
- how teachers encourage dialogue in the classroom;
- the setting of assessment criteria in the classroom; and
- organising collaborative learning.

Whichever activity they chose, the (principal) teacher was required to note down their existing practice, talk with students about it, change it, and interview students about the changes in order to plan future action. While these CYCLE 2 actions focused explicitly on Pakistani teachers' and pupils' experiences, I realised in retrospect that they were still biased towards the ways UK teachers operate, structurally guided by myself in UK, and written in English, thereby actually taking only minor account of the real situation of Pakistani schools.

In the event, far more teachers responded to the task at the very last minute than expected. This led to an overcrowding of their presentations and a shortening of keynote inputs. Their collective inputs lasted nearly two whole days. For each input, the other delegates had structured questions to pose to each other to problematise each presentation and make links to their own schools.

CYCLE 3. Feedback about the March 2014 conference

Following the March 2014 conference, for CYCLE 3 of the project, a further set of open-ended questions was presented to those who had participated in CYCLE 2. The sample of respondents included, from private schools in Pakistan: 40% principals, 36% heads of department, 14% other teachers and the rest administrators.

This set included questions about the following perceptions (with a view to re-planning for yet further future provision, not recorded in this article): *the value of the TAKE conference and factors that contributed to making it valuable; changes, if any, that the conference facilitated; role played by UK university-based consultants; ways in which this conference contributed to achieving Pakistan's educational aspirations; how teachers responded to activities and why; and what value there was in teachers carrying out preparation 'action research' activities.*

Data analysis and ethical issues

All the scripts for CYCLE 1 and later CYCLE 3 were initially read through so that I could start to understand teachers' perceptions. Next the responses to each question were scrutinised in detail to identify themes that suggested answers to the research questions. For CYCLES 1 and 2, responses were fed into each subsequent CYCLE. The themes that arose in each CYCLE were codified and applied to all the responses as one unit which led to planning in the next CYCLE. From this scrutiny within each CYCLE, and then across the

three CYCLES, revised conclusions were derived, relating to teacher perceptions of the value of CPD led by an international academic consultant.

In relation to research ethics, the British Sociological Association guidelines were followed closely and the IoE's research ethics committee approved the conduct of this project. The participants were free to participate or not, their responses were anonymous unless they chose to use their personal email addresses and all were fully informed of the purposes of the research.

The research findings: the role of the international academic consultant

Participants perceived that the international consultant was helpful as a knowledge sharer and legitimiser

Although much research indicates that the main site for school teachers' learning is the school (e.g. Postholm 2012), it appears to be helpful when some input comes from beyond the institution – from experienced educators within the geographical area or beyond; from practitioner or academic bodies such as universities. My question then was, in Pakistan, should such input come from an 'international' consultant? One respondent in CYCLE 1 noted the benefits:

A man from abroad whether UK or USA will be taken more seriously than others
(that's the mentality of the nation - cannot help it).

What is so striking about this principal teacher's comments about Pakistani-UK relationships is his/her seeming acceptance of the historical ties and continuing supremacy of the British person. Although there were a few comments suggesting that this partnership should be a more equal one, the vast majority of statements in participant comments from CYCLE 1 and CYCLE 3 reflected a belief that UK education was better or more advanced than Pakistani education and that therefore a UK educator had good reason to lead development in Pakistan. In keeping with this approach, Pakistani respondents described UK education as 'highly respected' and as 'way ahead'. One writer in CYCLE 1 believed:

It's great to welcome UK presenters at Pakistan teacher development events as we can get opportunity to have [a] look at all progress going on in the field of education and professional development of teachers in UK and [it] can be beneficial through their experiences.

The relationship between Pakistan and UK was generally described with warm adjectives such as ‘cordial’, ‘healthy’ and ‘friendly’ although one person claimed it to be ‘strained’. Indeed historically, UK was seen as a friendly western power who put into place many current successful Pakistani institutions such as Cambridge O and A level examinations and the British Council. Some respondents saw Pakistan and UK as partners not only in education but also in war and in trade. These people seemed to believe that further contact with UK consultants in Pakistan was likely to keep improving the relationship.

Because of the perceived good standard of UK education, some respondents in both CYCLES 1 and 3 considered the international consultants as valuable because they brought with them the ‘higher level’ and ‘first world’ international perspectives and practices in education. These were the phrases they used to refer generally to UK educational perspectives and practices, although they did not identify which. Other respondents simply valued learning about ‘different’ cultures and ways of doing things, but this was as part of becoming culturally diverse on a more equal footing with the rest of the globe. One teacher in CYCLE 1 wrote, for example: “It is important to interact with other perspectives”.

Out of the possible 70 CYCLE 1 responses to questions about Pakistani-UK relationships, there were only ten who seemed to call for more equality and who did not seem to accept the idea of the UK’s superiority. One person said they felt that: “UK needs to show more respect towards Pakistani point of views”. Another mentioned of the international consultants: “They don't have any clue on what is happening in education systems in Pakistan”. The need for international consultants to be familiar with local classrooms and their contexts was emphasised. One comment read: “In my humble opinion our local Pakistan trainers are very very capable. They do deliver as they know our strengths, weaknesses, most of all how we can improve”. In CYCLE 3 too, respondents indicated that someone with more hands-on experience of Pakistani classrooms would be more suitable; and some intimated that local

people knew the situation better and would therefore be better facilitators. Another person suggested during CYCLE 1 that a ‘mix and match’ between UK and local presenters during the conference would be most valuable – as indeed was exemplified at the subsequent TAKE conference of CYCLE 2.

However, in CYCLE 3, following CYCLE 2 in which much input was provided by local colleagues rather than consultants, there were expressions of the need for more challenging input specifically from the UK consultants, including a focus on other educational research and also some particular topics. There was the sense that they had heard too much from their local colleagues and not enough from the ‘experts’. Ten comments suggested that the organisation of the conference could have been better if less time had been spent listening to local presenters.

Perhaps this was also related to CYCLE 3 responses which suggested including in conferences more hands-on or practical and interactive activities [n=12]. Some delegates wanted even closer connections to classrooms [n=14], including bringing in Pakistani classroom teachers to the conference, taking the conference to more places in Pakistan, more often, and providing more follow-up suggestions. Ten delegates specifically suggested that colleagues from government schools be included in TAKE.

On the other hand, overall in CYCLE 3, following the participatory approach of the CYCLE 2 conference in which local expertise was championed, 38 out of 51 delegates claimed that they responded enthusiastically and/or actively to the conference activities, and nearly half indicated that this was due to the fact that delegates could identify directly with the activities and thus found them interesting. This was particularly the case because the sessions drew on the participants’ own experiences and expertise. Thus local expertise and practice seemed to be highly valued here, while the UK consultants did nothing more than compere the stream of presentations. A further nine responses emphasised that delegates enjoyed being able to

present to and learn from colleagues, an opportunity that they rarely encountered. A factor that had not been fully recognised before organising the second CYCLE, was that Pakistani teachers in particular, seemed very keen to talk, present and have their voices heard. In future, this feature could be drawn upon more fully, but it should also be limited so that participants do not end up just listening to one colleague after another. In summary, it came to light that UK consultants were generally perceived as having more educational knowledge and yet at the same time, in tension with that perception, participants noted the benefits of learning with and from each other about Pakistani classrooms.

Participants seemed unconvinced about the usefulness of the academic consultant in TPD

University education faculty staff have been accused of inhabiting ivory towers, writing academic books and using subject specific jargon, rather than keeping in touch with the vibrancy of schools, classrooms and teachers (Postholm 2012). One respondent in CYCLE 1 perceived that practising school teachers "... see that the people who are preaching the change in their lives are talking the bookish knowledge and are not practising teachers themselves". If this was the case, why would a group of Pakistani schools pay for an international university lecturer, albeit one with practitioner expertise, to lead teachers' professional development? The colonial history of Pakistan and the elite's sustained (yet unwarranted?) respect for the top echelons of academia probably provides one sound answer to this question. But is this appropriate? Even if UK academic knowledge was at a 'higher level' than Pakistani academics', is academic knowledge really important for teachers' professional development or would a practitioner without academic credentials do a better job?

In CYCLE 1, forty-eight respondents commented on the weak role of universities in Pakistan as supporters for TPD. Several people described a gulf between universities and schools, in particular between government universities and schools. A few respondents recognised that some universities provided effective teacher training courses as well as MBAs. Overall,

however, the view of Pakistani universities was gloomy. This was perhaps one good reason, and one with which the TAKE project was initiated, for inviting academic experts from a UK university. One participant pointed out that many people in Pakistan go to the UK for their higher studies to what they called ‘renowned institutions’ and they therefore welcomed the trainers from these highly regarded seats of learning.

It may be worth exploring the ‘placebo’ factor related to the reassurance provided by the status of the international academic consultant masterminding the conference. In CYCLE 1, only 16 respondents out of 51 thought that university lecturers were valuable at such an event, which they saw justified by their superior theoretical knowledge or research. And 12 respondents suggested explicitly that university lecturers were actually not the best leaders of such a conference. However, a teacher in CYCLE 1 suggested that not all schools were well enough resourced or informed to choose their own effective professional trainers. It seemed that the academic credentials of the consultant were as important as their hands-on approach or at least these gave schools a confidence in them that may not always have been warranted.

She commented:

I feel if the school is confused about which direction to take they tend to hire anybody [‘learned’] available, which results in sheer waste of time.

It may be, therefore, that academic credentials were highly respected but that the basis for this respect was questionable.

Participants perceived that talking with other professionals was more useful for classroom change than the input of international academic consultants

I explored, in CYCLE 3, my hunch that the previous TAKE conferences were not very effective in terms of changing classroom practice. My finding was that over half the respondents said that their experience of the TAKE conference was indeed useful, but not

because of the consultants' input. Rather, it was because they had had a chance to speak and learn with other Pakistani teachers, a process that was merely co-ordinated by the consultants. One respondent wrote:

For me personally, the most useful aspect was the opportunity to interact with teachers/heads from different schools from across Pakistan. After the conference, I visited one of the schools as well and explored many good practices there which I have shared and implemented at my own school. I am also looking at the prospect of building academic partnerships with at least two [other] schools.

Delegates said they benefited from interacting with professionals across the spectrum of schooling. They valued their increased capacity for reflection on their own professional practices through talking with other teachers. They mentioned seeing and implementing educational practices in new ways and making practical plans for improvement. During CYCLE 3, this aspect, discussion and networking, was still perceived by most delegates to be the most useful aspect of the conference, despite the new participatory style of presentations in CYCLE 2. Delegates cited gaining support or encouragement from colleagues for what they were already doing in schools or trying to do.

Effective guidance of collaboration and discussion during the conferences was essential but having an international consultant to do this did not seem vital and indeed may have been inappropriate. However, for nearly half the sample of respondents in CYCLE 3 [n=24], the key role played by the UK consultant, and their usefulness at the conference, was as facilitator. The consultant '... played a vital role in running the flow of the events and kept everyone in a mode of learning continuously throughout the three days'. The style of facilitation may well have been different from more formal approaches they were used to, but this raises the question of why such formal approaches persist: they seemed to reflect a

general reluctance to challenge established authority and yet there was an acknowledgement that a non-authoritarian facilitator encouraged rich learning.

Participants expressed willingness to carry out preparatory work as guided by the international academic consultant

During CYCLE 1, only 26 out of a possible 70 respondents told me that they would be willing to do preparation for the next conference. Three people said they would definitely *not* have time to do this. Of those who were willing, seven agreed to carry out some action research as preparation, which is in fact what all participants in CYCLE 2 subsequently did. Time was mentioned by several respondents as an issue and early March (the time of the conference) was seen as particularly busy. There were a few participants who said they would like to prepare by reading research articles, which was another request that was met in actuality in CYCLE 2 as part of the guidance pack. What was also noticeable was that, despite my sending emails directly to those whose comments had indicated most engagement with a future conference, only one person responded when I consulted about the suitability of the materials I was sending out. Proactivity and self-direction did not seem to be strongly reflected by the CYCLE 1 comments.

In contrast, following respondents' active participation during CYCLE 2, there were only 14 teachers out of 51 who said the 'action research' before the conference was not useful. Among the 37 positive responses, enthusiasm for preparatory action research was attributed to the following.

- Action research actually enhanced their learning or their practice in its own right.
- Action research helped participants start focusing on the topics to be addressed at the conference which helped their learning during the conference sessions.

- The actual research activities motivated participants and encouraged a positive attitude among them.
- It gave delegates the opportunity to enlighten their colleagues about their practices, both in their own schools and at the conference.

This great enthusiasm challenged the idea that teachers there could not be innovators, albeit mainly principal teachers. Perhaps the difference between CYCLE 1 and CYCLE 3 responses can be explained by one person's comment from CYCLE 1 in which she described teachers' need to be given an initial push and some concrete guidelines:

They are very much interested in their professional development. But only when they *see the way forward* do they begin the journey of professional development (my emphasis).

Implications for practice

My aim for this action research was to investigate the value of the international academic consultant from a developed to an under-developed country, with a view to improving the value of my own future practice as an international academic consultant and of problematizing more generally this model of teacher development. My means for achieving this were asking, acting and then re-asking participants in this specific teacher development project in Pakistan about their perceptions of the issues.

One surprising outcome was that participants perceived the academic consultant's lecture-style keynote talks as useful because they drew on research. There was certainly a perception among delegates that universities in Pakistan had a weaker research profile than UK universities. This is a promising consideration and suggests that explicitly combining research with consultancies might be an innovative and valuable future project. Carrying out and possibly modelling qualitative educational research could be a particularly valuable

contribution for an international academic to make. In any case, introducing Pakistani or other educators to the range of educational research in the west could also help to showcase the tensions and contradictions in research findings and dislodge any unwarranted beliefs in one-(western)-size-fits-all educational answers to teaching and learning.

Another surprising finding was how greatly participants appreciated the consultant's role as facilitator rather than expert. Conversations with participants as well as written comments suggested that use of a mild approach that relied on the participants' reflection and dialogue, was somewhat novel to the delegates but helpful to their learning. Maybe having a female lead was a factor in this. Some people mentioned taking on board some of these facilitation strategies to adapt for their classrooms to improve pupils' learning. Perhaps modelling an approach is one very powerful but often neglected form of teaching and communication for the international academic consultant in TPD projects.

Another view that was more confused, was a belief that university lecturers conveyed 'theory' which, for some, was a bonus. Theory was differentiated from research in an intriguing way. Such a differentiation may have been based on the fact that in many lower income countries, university teacher training programmes tend to be theoretical, based on outdated research and led by non-practitioners (Vrijnsen-de Corte et al. 2013; Postholm 2012). However, this tendency towards uncontextualised 'theory' was not the case for the keynotes used during the TAKE conferences, which drew on my own experience as a primary school teacher as well as classroom research. This may explain the lack of consensus about the academic consultant's suitability to be supporting teachers' classroom practices. This is a debate that rages also in the UK where research and theory are perhaps more closely elided but both mistrusted by conservative central governments who seek to assert their own control (Guiroux 2005).

However, respondents' point about local teachers knowing more about the situation than international consultants cannot be ignored and to do the international consultancy job properly, some school visits to local schools at the very least would be valuable. In addition, some preparatory and follow-up conversations would be beneficial, with teachers and teacher leaders in the local area over email, Skype and other digital means. While school visits would increase the costs of international consultancy visits, these extra costs might be balanced by their increased value. The role of costs for both the consultant's university and the client body is an issue that raises ethical as well as practical concerns in relation to the mission of academics in the 21st century world.

In terms of organising a new conference for this specific group, the participants' personal investment and participation in the leading of conference sessions in CYCLE 2 has been shown to be extremely important and should therefore underpin all our future arrangements.

In terms of the conference's value in relation to the 'international' (mainly western) consensus on the constituents of 'effective' teacher development, participants did not perhaps have enough chance to identify their needs for the form and the content of their own professional learning in this project. However, through the conversations I held with them over the two years, they began to identify important areas for development, including an emphasis on Assessment for Learning; and action research as preparation for conferences.

The guidance pack they received prior to the 2014 conference [CYCLE 2] was quite prescriptive, although choice was also given. It is hard to believe that no-one in Pakistan could have devised such a document, but on the other hand, the internationally-oriented conference perhaps provided a useful incentive for teachers to actually make the effort to carry out the activities suggested.

Participants certainly expressed an appreciation for the chance they had at the TAKE conference to reflect, talk, inquire and challenge each other collaboratively, within and/or

across institutions. By focusing on principal teachers in schools, TAKE seems to have encouraged leaders to make space and give support to those who are learning, but how flexibly this is being done, and with what extent of self-direction on the part of their classroom teachers, is a question that now needs to be followed up.

It was clear that the TAKE conferences had the potential to act as a network among a range of educators in Pakistan, and widening this range was a valuable aspiration for the project. The reach of impact can be widened in a variety of important ways. Pre-planned, systematic follow-up meetings across the two countries by internet, and within Pakistan face to face, could allow the project to sustain its momentum. The follow-up could even be the focus of research by local schools and/or the consultant's university.

Impact can also be widened by opening up the target clientele. It could be expanded to include more classroom teachers as well as principals/heads of department. It could also reach out to government schools as well as private ones. In this respect, we are planning to include teachers from government schools, and translators from Urdu into English, at any subsequent TAKE conferences. Participants were very clear that in their perception, discussing and sharing expertise was the most useful means of development for teachers. However, great care and sensitivity will be needed in order to make such an initiative productive. Some of Hargreaves' (2014) principles for 'Joint Practice Development' will need to be emphasised and supported, with Private-Government partnerships within Pakistan. In particular, elite schools will need to see that their own needs for development are as great, albeit in different areas, as those of their government school colleagues: and they will need to be prepared for constructive criticism from the latter. This is a learning that also informs my own role as international academic consultant in relation to Pakistani clients.

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