

'Harnessing brain gain': creating a professional space for transnational migrant professionals

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28 November 2013

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OF AUCKLAND**

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

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Incorporating the Auckland College of Education

Transnational migrant professionals

- Transnational migrants 'establish social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders' (Glick-Schiller 1992), effectively bringing different communities, cultures, nations into a single social field
- Transnational professionals engage in contact and exchange between host societies and societies of origin – also professionally
- Professionals who choose to pursue opportunities to practise in other countries not only cross national borders, but may enter unfamiliar professional territory

New Zealand Context

- Radical shift in NZ migration policy, 1987: 'Points' system favours well-educated professionals and those meeting the 'skills shortage'
- More than 50% of migrants to NZ enter under the 'skilled migrant' category (Statistics New Zealand, 2006)
- Many countries (UK, Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand) rely on overseas-trained professionals to fill workforce shortages (Welbourne, Harrison & Ford, 2007; Simpson, 2009)
- New Zealand culture of 'overseas experience' (OE) and popular destination for migrants (with 22.9% of the resident population born overseas (Statistics New Zealand, 2006)).

Workforce mobility: Social Work

- Social work is a global profession practised in over 140 countries with 80 countries belonging to the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW)
- Attempts for consistency in recognition of global mobility: Universal social work professional values; Global Qualifying Standards; International definition of social work; International social work curricula (IASSW); Registration reciprocity

Workforce mobility: Social Work

- Political, cultural, social and economic contexts shape how social work is practised (Connolly & Harms, 2010) and definitions of social work vary with the time or jurisdiction in which they are developed (Staniforth et al., 2011)
- Education and prior experience can only partially prepare social workers for practising in a new country
- Similar to literature on other health professions

'Crossing Borders' research

Study of overseas-qualified social workers in New Zealand

- Census of NZSWRB registered social workers with an overseas social work qualification (n=234)
- Key informant group interviews (n=18)
- Online survey of overseas-qualified social workers (n=294)

Study of NZ-qualified social workers in UK

- Individual semi-structured interviews (ongoing)

Study of NZ-qualified and experienced social workers returning to NZ

- Online 'coming home' survey (active)

Findings

- Professional relocation (dislocation)
(Bartley et al, 2012; Fouché et al., 2013a)
 - Perceived status of social work
 - Professional identity and skills
- Cultural transitioning
 - Adapting to the local culture
 - Practising social work in a bi-cultural environment
 - Discrimination (Fouché et al., 2013b)

Perceived status of social work

- Reported as weaker (worse) than in the country where they qualified
 - Differences in the professional culture of social work across borders
 - Professional roles and public recognition
 - Legislation, policies and social context in which social work practice is embedded

- Extent to which their overseas training helped prepare them for practice in NZ overall positive:
 - 58.8% (N=127) prepared them well for practice in NZ
 - 17.1% (N=37) hadn't prepared them at all well

Continuing professional development

“How strong is CPD in New Zealand, compared to where you qualified?”

CPD	UK/ Ireland	Africa	Europe
Worse	34	3	10
	48.6%	10.3%	38.5%
About the same	20	7	4
	28.6%	24.1%	15.4%
Better	16	19	12
	22.9%	65.5%	46.2%

Comparing supervision by country

“How strong is supervision in new Zealand, compared to where you qualified”

Supervision	UK /Ireland	Africa	Europe
Worse	31	4	12
	44.3%	14.3%	44.4%
Same	19	10	5
	27.1%	35.7%	18.5%
Better	20	14	10
	28.6%	50.0%	37.0%

NZ qualified SW in the UK

- Overseas training: Adequate in preparing them for practice in UK
- CPD: encouraged and supported
- Supervision: about the same as in NZ
- Status of SW: Better than where they qualified
 - Professional roles and public recognition
 - Legislation, policies and social context in which practice is embedded

Professional Identity and Skills

- Under-utilization of skills reported:
 - 52.9% concerned by under-utilisation
 - ‘Valuable aspects of training that were unused in NZ’:
Specialist social work assessment/interventions; counselling and therapeutic work; specialised work with children and families; community work development, especially with cultural communities; mental health; leadership, training and practice teaching

- *I found it really difficult that I had all this training [in therapy with abused children] and a lot of experience which essentially I have never really used in NZ... I miss it because I loved that work (Janet)*
- *We were really well trained in group work – a big part of our training – and I found the social workers [here] really being reluctant to run groups, even if it's just educational groups or life skills or whatever, they just don't feel confident enough (Alice)*

Yet ...

- Participants reported high levels of satisfaction with their jobs:
 - Overall positive satisfaction experiences peaked at 86.3% (n=215) for current positions;
 - More than half the sample (56%) remains employed by their first NZ employer
- Previous studies of migrant social workers in the UK and Ireland suggest similar high levels of job satisfaction (Collins, 2008)

Job satisfaction

Satisfaction with current job (N=294)	N	%	Valid %	Cum. %
Very satisfied	89	30.3	35.7	35.7
Satisfied	126	42.9	50.6	86.3
Indifferent/Neutral	16	5.4	6.4	92.8
Dissatisfied	10	3.4	4.0	96.8
Very dissatisfied	8	2.7	3.2	100.0
Total	249	84.7	100.0	
Not Ascertained	45	15.3		
Total	294	100.0		

Findings

- Professional relocation (dislocation)
 - Perceived status of social work
 - Professional identity and skills
- **Cultural transitioning**
 - Adapting to the local culture
 - Practising social work in a bi-cultural environment
 - Discrimination

Practising social work in a bi-cultural environment

- Many different interpretations of biculturalism and multiculturalism
 - “Social workers that have worked in other countries will probably have had a much higher chance of working multi-culturally than social workers [in NZ]. They already have basic [cross-cultural] skills. One would expect it to be the same” (Tessa)*
- Training on biculturalism beneficial to their ability to practice social work effectively
 - “...having been [to cultural training] and had a year on Treaty of Waitangi in application to the workplace; that really explained it and it also took away a lot of the myths as well” (Sara)*

Adapting to local culture

- Professional acculturation, especially understanding biculturalism and working with Maori, a challenge for foreign-born social workers (Nash & Trlin, 2004) and on-going in 2013
- *"I just thought it would be the same as home"*

A possible disjuncture between existing expertise, the expectations of the new context and the nature of context-specific (cultural) training may contribute to the experience of professional dislocation

Adapting to local culture

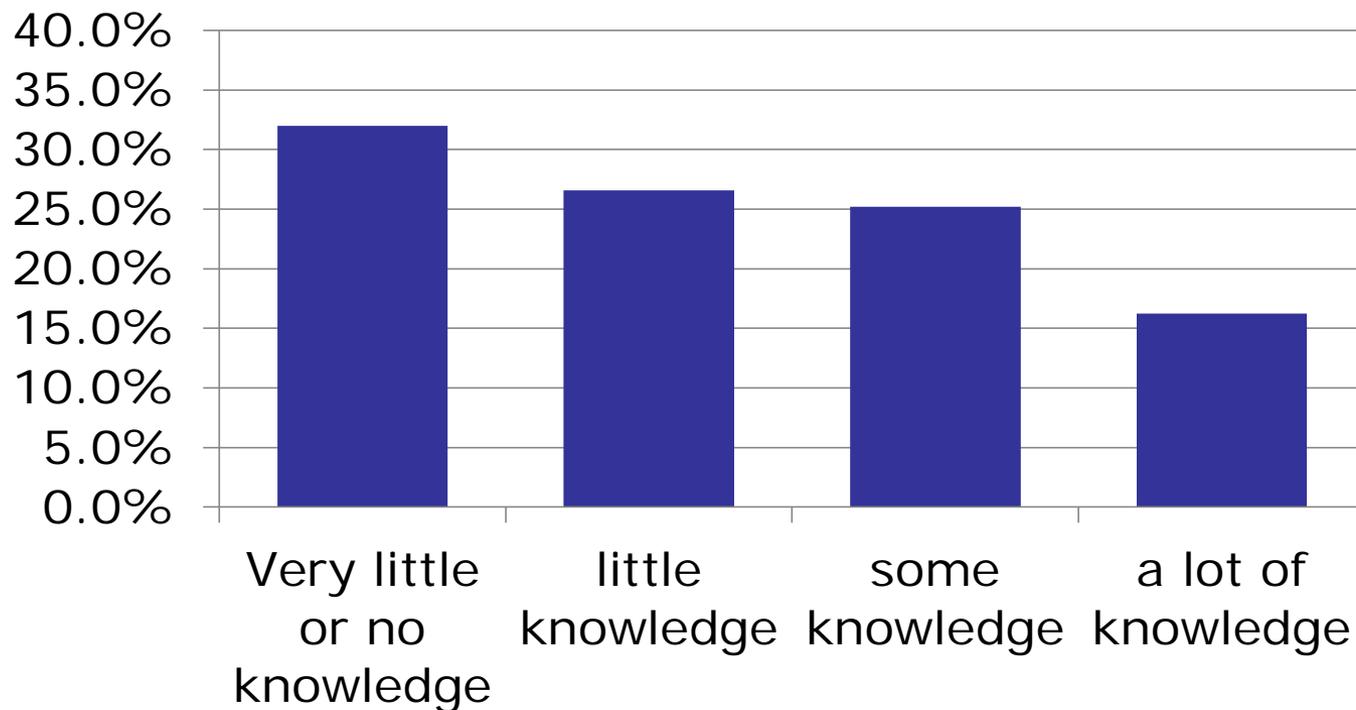
- *“I was amazed at the systems here, the benefit system and everything else that went with that. It was totally different from what I perceived to be possible. Certain parts of it I appreciate other parts of it I hate” (John)*
- *“I think the definition of poverty in New Zealand and the definition of poverty in my paradigm where I came from was totally different, totally different things and I understand living here that some people have less than others but poverty I have not seen in New Zealand” (Anna)*

NZ qualified SW in the UK

- Encountering differences of culture in the domains of community, professional and workplace was common across the interviews.
- *“What does it mean to be Scottish? They’re like – ‘you’ve got to put up with crappy weather, eat porridge, like whisky”* (Ellie)
- Many participants observed a strong public discourse of assimilation: *“any new people to the country were welcomed so long as they were ‘doing it like we do it’.”* (Laura)
- Some successfully adapted and overcame initial culture shock, most often through discovery in practice and asking “dumb” questions.

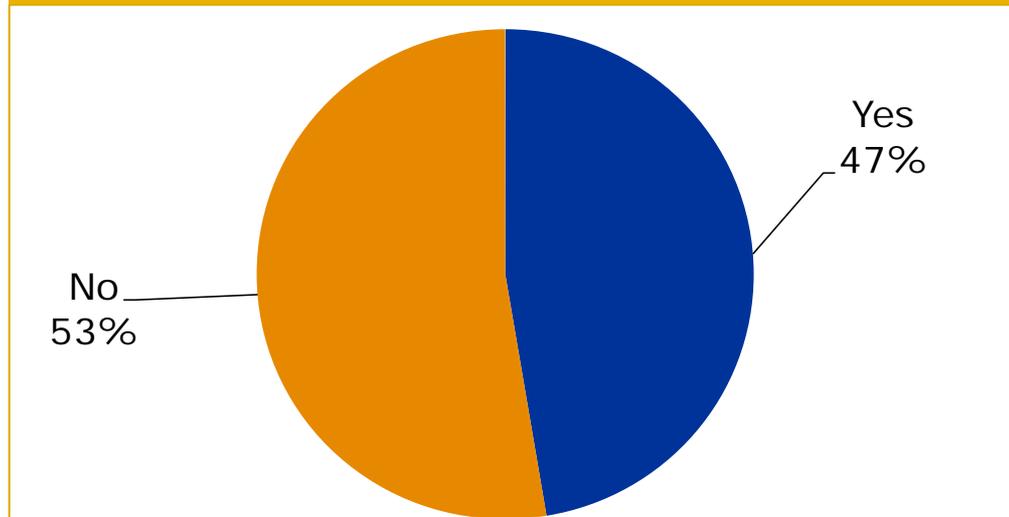
Pre-migration expectations

58% of the respondents professed little or no knowledge of NZ professional context (including 44% of those from UK/Ireland); 4% had no knowledge at all



Post-migration induction

Received any induction at first New Zealand social work job (n = 226)



- District Health Boards: 60% received no induction
- CYFS: 24% received no induction
- NGOs: 70% received no induction

Discrimination

- 51.4% reported having experienced some discrimination or mistreatment in the context of their employment
- Types included sabotage by others that prevented work from getting done, verbal abuse and humiliation
- 10% reported experiencing all of these

Discrimination

“I felt devalued which I believe is in part because I am English, white and middle class.

I have felt at times that I am not trusted as a social worker in this country, and never will be because I am English”.

Implications

Migrant and local professionals to have a clear understanding of:

- global professional identity
- how that fits into the local professional context

They need to be able to better anticipate and appreciate the differences inherent in the new *professional context*

Implications

Professional bodies, educators and employers to:

- establish processes for aiding migrant professionals to understand the broader (local) professional discourse
- facilitate migrant professionals' adjustment to the new professional setting (more than the workplace)
- consider how migrant professionals are welcomed and supported

Understand that professionals do not arrive as 'blank slates' and do retain contact with host professionals

How effectively do professions engage with the professional issues of a global workforce?

- Is there a transnational professional space?
- If so, what are the implications for practice and education?
- How effectively do employers of migrant professionals facilitate their transition to a new context?
- How do we educate students to be effective transnational professionals? Or do we?

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