



Skilled migrants and their families: a brain gain or brain waste?

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Outline of presentation

- An overview of migration in Australia
- Migration and education policy logics
- The research rationale and questions
- The case study, concepts and methods
- Findings – brain gain and waste
- Concluding thoughts

Migration flows: Australia

- Since 1996 focus on discretionary skilled migration to solve skill shortages, especially outside capital cities;
- Sending regions: Northeast Asia (18.0 %) Southern Asia (16.2 %), Europe (15.6 %) and Oceania (15.3 %);
- Net migration hasn't slowed since GFC in 2008, unlike US, UK, Europe; Increased public fear of 'boat people';
- 26% of Australians born overseas (DIAC 2011);
- Off-shore processing and settlement of asylum seekers from 2013.

The two faces of migration

Australian Government

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Migration policy logic – brain gain

Migration policy is “*to fill gaps in the labour market where they currently exist*” (Phillips and Spinks, 2012,p16)

- ‘Managed migration’ to benefit the Australian economy
- Migrants selected to ‘fit’ job demand
- Shift to ‘perceived’ skills shortages (employer demand)
- Values human capital theory and individuals’ brains
- Policy towards asylum seekers fulfills residual obligations
- For ‘boat people’, there’s no room in Australia
- Tensions 21stC multi-culturalism & pre’70s ‘white Australia’

Education policy logic: brain gain

Education problems & solutions focus on the economy...

- *Skill shortages* - increase proportion of population with undergraduate qualifications and Foundation Skills;
- *Participation* - Australia ranks only 10th out of 34 OECD countries on workforce participation;
- *Unrealised workforce potential* - 1.4 million unemployed or underemployed. Another 1.3 million NIL could work;
- *Targets* - low SES increase HE participation to 20%; and regional and remote areas and indigenous people.

Source: Skills for Prosperity (2011) and The Bradley Review (2008)

Migration experience: brain waste

- Skilled migrants lift the education level of states (23%) (Hugo and Harris, 2011);
- Skilled migrants more likely to be unemployed or inappropriately employed (ABS, 2009; 2010 a & b);
- Skilled migration is often a family affair, not an individual pathway;
- Over a third of skilled migrant secondary applicants (37%) to Australia as a whole had not worked since arrival (ABS, 2009; 2010 a & b).
- Skilled migrants are motivated to find work and move interstate much more than population as a whole (Hugo and Harris, 2011)

Education logic and migrants' experience

Social inclusion defined as not having tertiary education – the human capital to obtain a high skills employment and economic benefits

Therefore skilled migrants are seen to be socially included because they already have tertiary qualifications.

Skilled migrants only have access to funded tertiary education when,

1. International students, a visa route to permanent residency
2. Have permanent residency and study a lower level qualification
3. Humanitarian/refugee settlers who can access the Adult Migrant English Program AMEP

AMES in Victoria the Adult Migrant Employment Services vision is “Full Participation for all in a cohesive and diverse society.”

Research questions

- *What are the experiences of secondary skilled migrants, especially women, in settling and obtaining employment in regional Australia.*
- *How can education and training contribute towards socially inclusive outcomes for migrant women and their families in regional Australia?*

Methodology and methods

Case Study – a regional city and environs in Victoria, Australia

Qualitative interviews:

- 35 skilled migrants (24 female 12 male)
- 35 professionals from 20 organisations working with migrants
 - Education and training organisations
 - Employers and employer groups
 - Departments and agencies across government levels
 - Non-governmental organisations
 - Community and religious groups

The regional case, an inland city, Shepparton and surrounding region



Source: Google Maps 22/6/2012

Policy logics...the state and employers want skilled migrants for brain gain

A local employer who has encouraged skilled migrants says:

[about the area] *the lowest participation rates in tertiary education, very, very low, completion rates of Year 12, Year 11, and Year 10, for that matter, very low aspiration, high level of dependency in Centrelink payments, pretty much every sort of little KPI, we're either the worst of the worst... aspirations just needs to be improved, [...] there has been, in the past, an abundance of low-skilled work on offer, but it's not increasing, so yes, we still need people to pick the fruit, but there's probably less of that. We still need people to work in the cannery, but they're moving to more automated stuff, and the business is winding down, anyway. The jobs that are going to exist here are going to be more and more requiring a high level of skill.* (Bernard, Managing Director)

Skilled migrants:

- can raise the skill level and develop the economy of a region
- and raise the educational aspirations

Unintended consequences of policy - skilled migrants ‘manage themselves’

Skilled migrants must create social networks to support migration.

I don't think for skilled migrants there are many support services. For refugee migrants, for others, we have many agencies working for them, but I don't know whether they have the assumption in their mind that skilled migrants will manage themselves. [Shalini, female, secondary applicant]

Migrants have to take individual responsibility for their transition

Class, gender and race impacts on social network participation

Brain gain - migrants' professional networks

Skilled migrants **normal career transition** and Australia's **brain gain**

Involved:

- International professional networks or 'hot knowledge' for job search information and experience of working in Australia
- Employer sponsorship provided visa, easy entry and initial re-location

Professional networks more able to lead to social inclusion through employment via 'weak ties' (Granovetter 1973), than the strong ties provided from friends and family, which help initial settlement only.

...a normal transition , brain gain

The primary applicant's maintenance of professional networks contributed to a sense of continuity.

There's no difference for me, I get into the car and come to work. [Vinayak, male, primary applicant]

Employer assistance also aided a family's transition to their new location.

The hospital... gave us a house for a while, which was furnished. So you didn't need to worry immediately about getting things... We just settled in. [Roshan, female, secondary applicant]

Continuity in employment also assisted in the development of new networks, assisting the transition for family members.

The previous manager who used to be here and they helped us a lot so a lot of credit goes to their families that support my wife and children. So they used to come every day to make sure that she is not feeling lonely, so that was fantastic support I got from my other colleagues in the organisation, so that went very well. [Vinayak, male, primary applicant]

Disrupted professional networks: brain waste

- Giving up employment and entering Australia without employment;
- Lack of ‘weak’ ties (employer sponsorship to provide hot knowledge)
- Expensive and lengthy entry via general skilled migration program;
- Lack of strong ties (family resources to help financial costs of settlement or knowledge of where to settle);
- Skills, qualifications and experiences gained pre-migration seldom accepted by Australian employers;
- Pressure to be financially independent (not eligible for benefits payments for first two years).

Resulted in **risky migration trajectory, career disruption, brain waste**

...a risky transition , brain waste

We both came on skilled migration visas, thinking that we'll instantly get jobs in our areas and all that. But we had to obviously change our thinking... He was going to low levels, trying to find a job, because obviously, he had a wife and child to feed. [Aanchal, female, secondary applicant]

The biggest problem you face is that when you come here they do need experience and the experience that you have is from overseas. Probably is not considered as important or relevant to here. [Satwinder, female, secondary applicant]

I worked at a lot of odd jobs. I worked at Safeway for 3 months... My husband was working as a handyman. We're both doctors okay, but the jobs don't come to you on a plate. It takes time. [Fauzia, female, secondary applicant]

Brain gain and waste – and role of VET

- *Qualifications not recognised:* a tertiary qualified accountant in Nigeria and South Africa and MBA from China, former degree not recognised.

Brain waste: Not able to work as an accountant.

- *Visa category affects access to Australian education:* Arrived as a secondary applicant on temporary 457 visa. Waited until gained PR visa (to avoid \$20,000 course fees before returning to university to take a conversion course for accountancy.

Brain waste: Needs to find employment to cover all living costs

- *Need to requalify in Australia:* Studied for a Cert III in Aged Care with private provider (travelling to Melbourne) because the course was the fastest way to qualify for his current role as a care worker.

VET contributes to ‘de-skilling’ or brain waste, but migrant perseveres to study University conversion course in Accountancy to *regain* brain position.

(Typical male secondary migrants: James)

Brain gain or waste – the role of VET

- *Qualifications and experience not relevant to job market:* Degree in Business Administration from Belgium University, P.G. Diploma in Journalism from Colombo University, worked in social and media research in Sri Lanka.

Brain waste, intensified domestication caring for children with no local family support

- *Volunteering:* at daughter's school, teaches English to other migrants, supports humanitarian settlement and skilled migrant programs.
- *Reduced employment expectations to gain Australian experience:* gained part-time temporary employment in community work and now a project manager for an NGO.
- *Re-qualified for lower level employment:* Gained TAFE Cert IV in Training and assessment but fees very high because still on temp. 457 visa couldn't afford University study to qualify to become a teacher. Now an Australian citizen she is contemplating taking the Diploma in Education to become a teacher and her current employer is indicating support.

Brain waste, 'deskilling' and feminised labour market outcomes facilitated by Australian professional work through VET, potential to re-qualify in university for teaching, brain gain.

(Typical female secondary migrants: Damayanti)

Findings summary (1)

- Skilled migrants access to education and training *limited by visa types*.
- *Vocational education and training* largely viewed as *not relevant* by migrants and skilled migrants not seen as a target group by TAFES.
- Universities viewed as more relevant but courses *too expensive*.
- *Re-qualification* (de-skilling) for gendered lower skilled work mainly in *human services and child and aged care sector* often in private VET RTOs (cost/time).
- *Informal and lifelong learning* acquired through volunteering especially in services targeted at the vulnerable and humanitarian migrants.
- *Pioneer migrants* working on humanitarian and AMEP education programs segue pathways to volunteering and employment for newer arrivals.
- *Social networking* beyond the immediate strong ties of family provided opportunities to access new employment networks, and some post graduate university experiences building employability skills, knowledge and understanding of the Australian labour market and internship experiences.

Findings summary (2)

- Australian experience counts, the first reference is important.
- Successful pathway to employment in Australia depends on maintenance of professional networks & social capital.
- Modes of entry (e.g skilled secondary migrants) disrupt networks and lead to lost capital or weak social capital post-migration. (Supports Smyth & Kum 2010 in Scotland; Ryan 2011 on UK; Alfred 2010 on USA.)
- Secondary skilled migrants mostly female – *gendered brain waste*
- Race/ethnicity discrimination greater for ‘visible’ migrants who have lost professional capital – *race/ethnicity brain waste*. (Supports Boese & Phillips 2011; Colic-Peisker 2011 on Australia and Qureshi et al. 2012 on UK.)
- VET and employment practices contribute to brain waste and deskilling, channeling migrants to feminised, low paid human services work. (Extends Shan, 2013 on Canada)

Looking forward...

- Migrants rebuild networks when institutions (e.g.VET, HEIs, Employers; Migration Agencies) *actively* intervene to segue pathways to employment and powerful social networks.
- Migrants outside powerful networks fall back on own resilience & entrepreneurialism, a less powerful form of social capital for ‘getting by’, on ethnic economy of patron-clientism and on informal learning to build relational capital. (Supports Morrice, 2007; Qureshi et al. 2012; Jackson, 2010).
- The voluntary sector provides easy access to some networks, but these are embedded in different classed, ‘race’ and gendered socio-cultural relationships from the voluntary networks of established local social clubs and societies. (Supports Slade & Schugensky, 2010 on Canada.)

Conclusion – the brain gains and wastes

- Skilled migration is changing Australia, contributing to regional development and the sustainability of communities in inland cities, but at a *cost to skilled migrants' full social inclusion and brain waste*;
- The individualistically focused human capital approach of **policy neglects the human side of migration** and the inherent power and conflict of social positioning and re-positioning through migration;
- Policies **neglecting gender, race and 'household' as the unit of analysis** for decision-making and action fail to be socially inclusive or support settlement;
- **Formal education and training assumes skilled migrants are 'socially included'** and fails to target these groups to provide access to powerful capitals.
- The role of social factors in migration is well established identifying the role of friends, family and networks in building migratory chains, **but chains maybe constrain not open opportunities**;
- Social capital analysis reveals different networks and informal learning give access to different gendered and ethnic resources and labour markets and economic capital or power.



A strategic decision



‘I played netball which I really don’t like but I did it purely for the social inclusion and now I am included, I don’t need to play it anymore.’ (Yas, female secondary migrant, Mexico)

Source: The Age, 4/6/2012

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Feedback and comments

- We invite your comments.
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Thank you