

## **N2 Beaumaris 1 Thursday 6 December 16.00 - 16.30**

### ***Migrant Academics and Professional Learning Gains: Perspectives of the Native Academic (0317)***

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#### **Introduction**

Recently, the UK voted to exit the European Union (EU), a situation that has caused concern within higher education (e.g. Killwick, & Cuddeford, 2016; Mayhew, 2017). This so-called 'Brexit' highlighted a perception that native workers are economically disadvantaged due to the presence of migrant workers. However, as UK Higher Education (HE) has over a quarter (28%) migrant academics (HESA, 2016) who come from different educational and professional value systems, the British academic may gain a wide variety of professional knowledge through working with their migrant colleagues. Research on migrant academics has mainly focused on the areas of academic mobility and the acculturation of migrants in their new environment (see for example Gimenez & Morgan, 2017). This type of research typically looks at the issue from the perspective of the migrant, offering descriptive analysis of the issues faced by academics when they cross international borders (e.g. Hosein et al, 2018). There appears to be limited research on the professional learning gains (PLGs) of native academics when they cohabit in work environments with migrant academics. The research explores the professional learning (non-) gains of the British (native) academic and how it particularly affects the nature of their pedagogical work. The objective, therefore, is of the study was to identify the possible professional learning gains of British academics and through this consider ways by which the gains can maintain or improve the teaching quality and student learning experience.

#### **Methodology**

In order to gain a deep understanding of the issues perceived to be important by the participants, and the ways in which these ideas are connected, the approach taken to elicit their knowledge structures was the map-mediated interview (e.g. Kandiko & Kinchin, 2012; 2013). Following the interviews, the maps were sent to the participants asking them to provide a written reflection on the map to elaborate on any of the aspects of the pedagogical interaction with other international colleagues which they may have not had an opportunity to discuss in the interviews. Five native academics/British academics were approached from three departments (15 interviewees in all) representing disciplines with different levels of migrant academics present based on national statistics: civil engineering (University of Surrey – highest percentage migrant academics), veterinary science (University of Surrey – average percentage of migrant academics), and early childhood education (Liverpool Hope – lowest percentage of migrant academics). These interviewees were approached based on recommendations by colleagues and their profile pages.

#### **Analysis and Key Findings**

Drawing on the five maps and narratives created for each discipline, the professional learning gains were identified for the three department's pedagogical cultural

network. The learning gains for these pedagogical cultural networks indicated that for individuals who are willing to adapt and show some cultural sensitivity there are learning gains which can be successfully incorporated into the pedagogical cultural network, such as changes to the curriculum and the cultural intelligence that academics gained in sensitivity relating to other migrant staff and students. The professional learning gains of the native academics based on these cultural networks seemed to mirror those identified by migrant academics namely that of increasing knowledge on multiculturalism and internationalising the curriculum (such as through international examples in the curriculum knowledge). However, within these cultural networks, there are less learning gains around pedagogical knowledge, innovative pedagogy as well as internationalisation opportunities for students. Further, it appears that professional learning gains occur regardless of the international composition of the department and it may be dependent on the department and the migrant academic openness and adaptability in learning from each other. In conclusion, it appears, as we should expect, that having migrant academics in a department, provides a number of professional learning gains, which if used wisely can be used to affect change on the curriculum and the student learning experience.

### **Concluding thoughts**

One outcome that is evident from a close examination of these illustrative cases, is that the details that reside behind the terms 'migrant academic' and 'professional learning gains', are highly varied and idiosyncratic. Even within the research literature it is clear that different labels are used to mean the same thing whilst the same label is used to describe different things, such that any meta-analysis of findings will be speculative at best. It may, therefore not be helpful to generalise too much about what a migrant academic is, or what the potential learning gains for academics in a host institution might be. However, it may be more helpful to consider the pathway to intercultural competence that may or may not lead to professional learning gains. Gimenez & Morgan (2017: 89) offer a concept that helps illustrate how PLGs can manifest through interactions, that is, "transformative collaboration". Essentially they point out how skills, values and principles can be enhanced via dialectic relationships between Native Academics and Migrant Academics. Like much learning in higher education, the management of (dis)comfort may be seen as the starting point (e.g. Kinchin et al. 2017). A certain amount of discomfort is needed to promote dialogue to explore the underlying values that dictate our actions. Without an exploration of professional values, individual actions may simply indicate that someone is an 'outsider' who has not yet been 'assimilated' – overlooking the fact that it is the migrant who is potentially adding to and enhancing the domestic environment. Where there is an atmosphere of mutual respect, supported by a level of intercultural competence (Deardorff & Arasaratnam, 2017), there is an increased likelihood that some form of professional learning gain will be achieved, by the migrant as well as by the host. A breakdown in any one of these stages is likely to reduce the potential for professional learning gains. A tentative pathway may therefore be seen as providing a route towards learning gains without prescribing what those gains might be or how they will be manifest in the host institution.

