



## **‘So far so good’: Academic migrants adjust to teaching in Aotearoa New Zealand’s tertiary vocational sector**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Tertiary education providers increasingly recruit international teaching staff in their drive to fill skills gaps and build institutional knowledge and research capacity but literature examining the adjustment experiences of these academic migrants remains limited. This multiple case study focuses on Aotearoa New Zealand’s ITP (Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics) sector and explores how the experience of migration has impacted on four long-term academic staff with a range of industry, teaching and research experience. Adapting to a new teaching and learning environment presented initial challenges for some of these migrant teaching staff, but their overall adjustment experience has been positive. The study identifies factors which have influenced their successful acculturation and highlights how these international teaching professionals are contributing significantly to the academic life of their institution, particularly in the area of curriculum development.*

### **ACADEMIC MIGRATION: AN UNDEREXPLORED PHENOMENON**

A growing body of research has explored how international students adjust culturally, socially and academically to a new environment, but the experiences of migrant teaching staff remain underexplored (Lewis, 2005; Mason & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2014; Morley et al., 2018; Rumbley & de Wit, 2017; Teichler, 2015), particularly in the area of long-term mobility of academic staff (Mihut et al., 2017; Rumbley & de Wit, 2017).

While the potential value of international academic staff to their institutions and communities is increasingly being acknowledged (Altbach & Yudkevich, 2017; Handal, 2014; Kim, 2017; Mason & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2014; Minocha et al., 2019; Pherali, 2012; Rumbley & de Wit, 2017; Walker, 2015), an interesting question raised in recent literature is whether current global research into academic migration is focused on elite universities and their faculty, rather than “worker bee” faculty (Mihut et al., 2017, p. 15). Bönisch-Brednich (2014) acknowledges a significant international faculty presence in New Zealand universities but the Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITP) sector also

employs migrant teaching staff, whose voices are under-represented in the literature. This paper aims to highlight some of the important contributions made by academic migrants working in the vocational education and training sector.

In the sections which follow, academic migration is first considered within a wider context of global mobility. The article then explores definitions of the academic migrant before sharing key findings from this study in the light of other national and international academic migration literature.

### **Globalisation, Migration and Academic Mobility**

Migration is suggested to be one of the most visible indicators of globalisation, having intensified and diversified significantly in the last quarter of a century (Castles, 2016; Triandafyllidou, 2018). It is described as a complex and often multi-stage undertaking which typically sees individuals moving within and between different immigration categories and occupying multiple visa statuses across time (Iredale, 2001; Roberts, 2019; Spoonley, 2012). A distinction is generally made between short-term and long-term or permanent migration, the latter referring to a “change of country of residence for a duration of one year or more” (United Nations, n.d., para. 2).

Motivations for migration typically centre around economic need, security and better prospects for quality of life (Triandafyllidou, 2018). Alfred (2015) and Webb (2017) acknowledge however that while some migrants relocate voluntarily in search of better economic or educational opportunities, others are pushed from their homelands due to a range of economic, social and political differences or conflicts.

Educational institutions have contributed significantly to global mobility through recruitment of international students (Webb, 2017) and academic staff too may be actively recruited for their potential to build knowledge and research capacity as part of an institution’s internationalisation strategy (Altbach & Yudkevich, 2017; Morley et al., 2018). The UK, Australia and New Zealand are three destinations noted by Walker (2015) as having large numbers of international faculty. Scholarly work from these countries (alongside other international academic migration literature) provides a foundation from which to explore definitions of the academic migrant and to identify some of the potential challenges and opportunities for New Zealand’s tertiary vocational sector academic migrants and their employers.

### **Who is an academic migrant?**

Existing literature demonstrates that defining the academic migrant presents considerable challenges (Altbach & Yudkevich, 2017; Hoffman, 2009; Rumbley & de Wit, 2017) given that individuals may choose to be mobile in different ways and for varying reasons and lengths of time (Mihut et al., 2017). Distinctions are often made however between temporary and permanent relocation of academic staff (Bauder, 2015; Mihut et al., 2017; Teichler, 2015).

A challenge for this study was that many of the definitions employed in the literature relate to university academics. Rumbley and de Wit (2017) for example define ‘international faculty’ for their purposes as “those academics who are hired from abroad by an institution as an employee” (p. 270), a scenario which may not adequately represent the varying circumstances in which vocational sector migrant teaching staff are recruited. Altbach and

Yudkevich (2017) characterise international faculty as “academics who hold appointments in countries where they were not born and/or where they did not receive their first postsecondary degree” (p. 1). The designation of ‘academic’ or ‘academic staff member’ in the New Zealand vocational sector however possibly denotes the type of employment contract a staff member is employed on, rather than the nature or extent of their work as an ‘academic’ in the traditional understanding of the term.

A strength of scholarly work by Walker (2015) is to acknowledge the potential impact of a staff member’s prior background and education. ‘International Academic Staff (IAS)’ are defined by Walker as “academic staff educated and enculturated in one system of education and currently teaching and researching in another” (2015, p. 61). The existence of “novice IAS” is also acknowledged by Walker (2015): “those who are lecturing/tutoring/supervising for the first time, having either recently completed their studies or held professional posts in contexts other than higher education ...” (p.61). Such distinctions are important and begin to provide scope for recognising that staff working in the tertiary vocational sector may be transitioning to teaching from industry roles or from graduate/postgraduate studies, the challenges of adjustment potentially only magnified by being a migrant.

Whilst acknowledging these varying temporal perspectives and individual definitions, for this study we selected a broader definition of the academic migrant, one which encapsulates an academic professional engaged in teaching and research who has not just undergone a physical relocation, but whose ideas and thinking have been reshaped in the process (Mason & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2014). The academic migrant might be characterised as an individual “who has experienced a cultural transition involving different cognitive styles of learning and who locates their field of enquiry in a supranational frame of reference” (Mason & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2014, p. 3).

### **Potential adjustment challenges for academic migrants**

As they adjust to a new environment, academic migrants may initially experience a range of personal, practical, financial, logistical and social issues which challenge them to varying degrees (Balasooriya et al., 2014; Lewis, 2005; Pherali, 2012; Rumbley & de Wit, 2017). Pherali (2012) shares how some of the logistical issues of finding accommodation, organising transportation and sourcing schooling for children became significant stressors for UK university staff alongside the work pressures of teaching, preparation and meetings. Lewis (2005) identifies culture shock and the initial difficulties of securing employment as significant challenges for female migrant staff in a New Zealand tertiary polytechnic. Family members are also impacted, with partners possibly less advantaged financially or professionally by relocation (Bauder, 2015; Pherali, 2012).

Adjustment to the new teaching and learning context can be a long and ongoing process (Bönisch-Brednich, 2014) involving a reassessment of values and construction of new understandings (Handal, 2014; Lewis, 2005). A more student-centred approach to teaching certainly appears to be a key challenge facing international teaching staff (Balasooriya et al., 2014; Lewis, 2005; Minocha et al., 2019; Walker, 2015) as they simultaneously transition between differing educational systems and cultural contexts (Mihut et al., 2017). Those

enculturated in an alternative learning and teaching environment can experience “cultural dissonance” as they attempt to fulfil their duties in a new educational context where differing values and norms may be a source of confusion or discomfort (Walker, 2015, p. 63).

Adapting to New Zealand’s bicultural and multicultural context could create further ‘uneasy dynamics’ for migrant teaching staff as they navigate a space in which local staff are perhaps not wholly comfortable themselves (Bönisch-Brednich, 2014).

Academic migrants will also need to consider how readily their subject expertise transfers to the new context (Handal, 2014). Balasooriya et al. (2014) illustrate that lack of familiarity with the local health care system presented challenges as their international academics transitioned to teaching roles in Australia. For those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, the linguistic challenges of delivering academic content whilst also adjusting to a new sociocultural context in which students may have disparate values and beliefs can be formidable (Pherali, 2012). International teaching staff may lack a ‘cultural compass’ by which to navigate these complex working environments and student populations (Walker, 2015).

Opportunities to directly influence curriculum development may be a source of contention. Academic migrants in a UK study by Minocha et al. (2019) reported feeling under consulted in this area despite their potential to make a significant contribution to internationalising the approaches and content. Indeed the academic migrant’s potential to interpret situations from multiple perspectives (Bönisch-Brednich, 2018; Kim, 2010; Lewis, 2005; Mason & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2014), innovate existing delivery (Altbach & Yudkevich, 2017; Rumbley & de Wit, 2017) and enrich teaching and learning perspectives (Handal, 2014; Mason & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2014; Minocha et al., 2019; Pherali, 2012) is widely reported in the literature.

International teaching staff inevitably hone their intercultural skills as a result of the experience of relocation but the support they receive is very much at the discretion of individual managers (Lewis, 2005). Altbach and Yudkevich (2017) stress how important it is that the new staff member feels part of the academic community while Lewis (2005) proposes that targeted communal professional development can provide opportunities to reflect on new experiences and leverage collective knowledge. Orientation and mentoring might aid with some adjustment factors (Bönisch-Brednich, 2014; Lewis, 2005; Minocha et al., 2019; Sawir, 2014), with local staff and students also being key stakeholders in creating a receptive and supportive environment (Bönisch-Brednich, 2014).

A scarcity of literature about tertiary vocational sector academic migrants prompted a guiding research question for this study: “How have academic staff working in an Institute of Technology in Aotearoa New Zealand experienced migration?”

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study was framed within a constructivist paradigm, with a view to exploring and understanding experiences of academic migration from the viewpoint of the research participants (Creswell, 2013). A multiple case study approach was adopted, the overall unit of analysis being the acculturation experiences of

academic migrant teaching staff working in a large tertiary ITP institution in Aotearoa New Zealand. Multiple case studies recognise the significance of context and allow comparison of similarities and differences between cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008) whilst recognizing each case as individual and contextual (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2000).

Individual 'cases' were conceptualised as migrant staff members involved in teaching and research who had likely undergone a cognitive cultural shift due to migration (Mason & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2014). A decision to focus on staff who had joined the organisation more recently led to further refinement of the participant research group as being long-term or permanent migrant teaching staff who had been with the selected tertiary provider for more than one year but less than five years. Participants were recruited through informal networking and an advertisement in the organisation's staff newsletter.

Direct interviewing was determined as the most appropriate means of gathering participants' personal perspectives, meanings, attitudes and explanations of phenomena (Yin, 2018). Participants engaged in two interviews of approximately forty five minutes to one hour each, spaced approximately one week apart. An information letter and consent form explained the nature of the research, outlined the voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw at any time up until data analysis had commenced. Participants were given an opportunity to review and amend their interview transcripts, with none opting to make any amendments.

The findings are reported thematically rather than on an individual case-by-case basis (Yin, 2018) to reduce the likelihood of specific quotes or stories being attributed to individual participants (Tolich, 2004). Teaching and research specialisms have likewise been withheld to protect participant identities. Exact speech was transcribed, regardless of grammatical errors and with the insertion of pauses (..) to acknowledge the natural breaks in speech as participants articulated their ideas. Bracketed pauses [...] indicate that some content has been edited.

The study has been undertaken in one region of New Zealand and within one tertiary education establishment. It is hoped, however, that the insights gathered expand the scope of existing national and international literature.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

Four academic migrants aged from thirty to forty-four participated in the study. Two were male and two were female. At the time of the study in January 2020, two participants held New Zealand residency while two were on temporary work visas with residency applications underway. All participants were the principal applicant in the visa application process. Countries of origin were Sri Lanka, South Africa, South America and the United Kingdom. Participants had been in New Zealand for periods ranging from two years to three and a half years. All participants migrated with at least a partner. Three participants had young families.

All participants had postgraduate qualifications and specialist industry expertise, gained either overseas or in New Zealand. Formal teaching experience on arrival was variable. All staff had some previous tutoring or teaching experience in their home country, this often having been combined

with study, working in industry or running their own business. Three out of four staff had completed New Zealand adult teaching qualifications since arrival, the fourth planning to commence studies imminently as part of the institution's academic staff development policy. All now had permanent roles with the ITP provider but their initial contracts varied from casual hourly paid roles to fixed-term or permanent appointments. All four participants were active researchers.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Migratory pathways**

While existing literature may profile university staff who move for a contract or permanent role in another country, some participants in this study had arrived in New Zealand in very different circumstances.

Two participants mobilised postgraduate study as a pathway to enter the country, with hopes of staying more permanently. One studied for a Masters degree with the organisation whilst working for them part-time on a casual contract. A second found employment immediately after completing postgraduate studies at a different institution, noting how strategically gaining New Zealand work experience as a private tutor whilst studying had assisted them to find work quickly:

I tried to add more New Zealand experience to the CV because .. you know they don't care what experience you have back in [home country] .. they're looking for New Zealand experience.

A third participant moved to New Zealand to take up an advertised appointment, arriving on a temporary work visa and with an open mind:

I think we initially maybe viewed it as 'we'll see how this goes for three years' .. like live out the life of our visa and then reassess .. so that was actually a big driver for me in terms of just getting stuff done and trying to progress and you know build up your CV a bit ..

Three out of four participants had therefore arrived in New Zealand on temporary visas, a significant impact of this being the uncertainty it created. This participant shares a desire to remain permanently but recognises that there is no guarantee:

.. so yeh obviously we're going through like the residency thing at the moment .. and that will be great provided we get that ..

One participant secured a fixed-term contract with the organisation under the strict visa conditions of a one year postgraduate study open work visa. At the end of this period, a proportional contract of at least 0.8 (30 hours) would be essential however if they were to be allowed to remain in New Zealand over the longer term:

If they are not changing my role into 0.8 next year .. or if they are going to give me the whole 0.6 and 0.4 fixed term role next year, I can apply for a work visa. Otherwise, I won't be able to. My

manager said 'I can't assure' so I was thinking 'OK this is uncertainty so I need to do whatever things I can do within this time to get qualified for a next job I'm applying for'.

Another participant would have liked more organisational support as they navigated the complexities of renewing a visa, this sometimes resulting in desperate calls to immigration:

I actually have a hundred students that are relying on me to come to work ..

Participant comments illustrate the potential stresses as visa regulations and employment responsibilities intersect, the immigration status of these ITP sector academic migrants appearing more fragile than those profiled in existing academic migration studies.

Only one participant had been granted New Zealand residency before relocation, their PhD qualification securing them sufficient points to apply for permanent residency. The participant explained that "it's not so common to get the offer letter being overseas" and noted a deliberate decision to apply for residency despite it being "more risky" and "expensive".

### **Teaching and industry backgrounds**

These participants appeared to represent a potentially different breed of academic migrant to those profiled in existing literature. Three of them had simultaneously managed a career in industry or private practice alongside teaching to this point.

This participant explained how they had combined working in their industry specialism with some tertiary teaching experience in their country of origin:

So I ran a private practice .. and I worked also as a Regional Manager for a private training organisation. And I had been doing that for various organisations for the last 17 years as well .. so I'd always had a private practice and then done tertiary teaching.

As teaching staff working in the tertiary vocational sector, they felt that a combination of knowledge and practical expertise in their given domain was important to their credibility:

I think what's great about working at [this institution] is you need an element of street cred or you know .. you need to know your trade.

So you can be an academic your whole life and be great at teaching but if you've not been involved in industry sometimes you just miss that .. yeh that overlay.

### **Personal Adjustment**

The findings illustrated that participants were often dealing with a range of personal and practical issues as they started their new employment. This

participant shared the pressures of prioritising work whilst still resolving accommodation issues:

[The] team manager called me and she said 'you got one week' [...] so I had that week to prepare for three modules .. [It] was quite intensive for me. So I had to work at night and I didn't had a place to stay here. I just book a motel for a whole week .. and was staying here and working hard with all the modules.

The support of local staff helped participants to overcome initial practicalities without too much difficulty, meaning that logistical issues were not the potential stressor identified by Pherali (2012). One participant described the support in this way:

I think the support actually was excellent [...] not just from [this organisation] but from other organisations in terms of coming over .. so like [my bank] were really helpful [...] and there were plenty of people I could speak to about how to [...] find somewhere to live [...]. Staff here were really supportive as well initially in terms of helping us with like transport or getting transport .. to and from places.

Other migrants were found to be an important source of assistance in personal adjustment to the new context. This participant explains being able to draw on existing migrant contacts in-country for help with initial practicalities:

One of my friend .. she is a citizen here .. she offered her place to stay so we didn't need to pay any rent .. for the first three months .. so they helped us with the food as well.

Migration had a significant impact on immediate and wider family relationships in this study. Many expressed feelings of homesickness, some enduring periods of separation from their immediate family or partner:

.. yeh so they [my children] were really little and I actually came over first on my own because their visas hadn't been approved.

Those participants with families placed children at the centre of the relocation experience and there were some striking examples of how lifestyle and personal security had changed for the better. This quote illustrates the effect of living in a safer country for one family:

I felt like I was safe .. it was really strange for me to not have security gates on the doors, burglar bars on the windows, to be able to sleep with the window open at night [...] My daughter was terrified [...] that there was a way that people could get in the house .. cos we're used to having bars on the windows .. and she's like 'people could get in' and I'm like 'they won't here, they're not going to'.

For the female participants, personal adjustment meant acknowledging that their husband was not advantaged by the move in the same way that they were,

echoing findings in the literature that the move is not always beneficial for all family members (Bauder, 2015; Pherali, 2012). The following quote illustrates the difficulties a participant's partner had sourcing work, for example:

He was a graphic designer freelancer [...] but when he was trying to find jobs in his field they said they need New Zealand qualifications so they're not accepting of his qualifications so it's too hard for him .. so he been sticking to the [supermarket job] [...]. He started studying last year because we got the residency.

There were different observations around language issues, as experienced by native or non-native speakers of English. Initial comprehension difficulties for participants who were non-native speakers of English caused one participant to question why locals made no accommodations:

It seems that a local person here .. of course they realise that you are not so fluent .. but they don't change the communication style [...]. They don't slow down, they don't use easier words, they just talk as normal .. even if someone is struggling to understand.

In contrast, a native English speaker emphasised that facility with the English language can lead to misassumptions that one is coping and adjusting to the new environment. The following quote suggests that their personal adjustment to life in New Zealand is assumed, yet this is not necessarily the case:

I am English speaking and I look New Zealander and I fit in .. but I will have moments where I just need [...] somebody just to give me some space because I'm having a really bad emotional day.

These insights from participants illustrated how issues of language and culture can be significant considerations in terms of overall adjustment (Rumbley & de Wit, 2017), albeit experienced differently and to varying degrees.

### **Professional adjustment**

As participants began to adjust to a new cultural context, they inevitably made comparisons with the teaching and learning environment they had left behind. Seemingly minor cultural differences can appear significant when examined through one's own cultural lens, as this participant explained:

.. so the big thing that I actually still sort of notice .. I don't know why it unsettles me a bit but it just does .. like a lot of our students wear caps all the time and you just wouldn't do that [...] it's more like a respect thing [...] you just don't wear a hat indoors in the UK .. but it seems like you do here [...], it's actually quite a pronounced cultural difference.

The same participant also noted some new teacher behaviours to learn in respecting Māori tikanga (culture and customs). For example, when observing teacher behaviours in the classrooms they noted:

.. sitting on tables, that's not a 'tikanga' thing to do .. in the UK like your most relaxed lecturers and things [...] they'd always be stood at the front lecturing but maybe they would sit on a table to give an element of being relaxed .. whereas you can't do that here.

A beginning teacher noted some early challenges of working with new student groups:

It was .. the first time experience with having that kind of different cultures students. I was thinking 'what they are thinking about me' .. 'am I doing the correct thing' you know .. the students are really not manageable [...], they didn't behave like adult students in the class. They were really noisy and playing with phones .. and because I'm a new teacher they will take granted ..

Another shared some challenges they had experienced relating to teaching, assessment and academic integrity, reflecting that this is still very much a learning curve for them:

... that was like the most challenging teaching I've had to do recently .. just the standards of what's considered acceptable between different cultures .. in terms of like academic rigour and what academic writing looks like and just the voice within your writing .. all that type of stuff .. it felt like it was poles apart.

With three out of four participants articulating difficulties in working with diverse student groups, the findings appear to complement those of Walker (2015) who notes this as a challenge area.

Student-centred teaching also appeared to be a new experience for three of the research participants. The institution's teaching and learning directives are strongly founded in Māori principles of 'ako', where teacher and student engage in the process of learning on a collaborative and reciprocal basis, growing new understandings from their shared experiences. Participants appeared to experience a cognitive cultural shift as they encountered new perspectives and compared them with their own teaching and learning experiences and philosophies. Sometimes there was a sense of personal conflict as new concepts were broached:

[These teaching concepts] were new to me [...], they certainly hadn't been described as explicitly to me . Everything made sense though .. yeh I tried not to fight people like [the adult learning course tutor] or whatever on some things.

The same teacher reflected on where the conflict stemmed from:

Yeh the big thing for me actually is the ability to lecture and engage people is a real skill and I will defend that as best as I can. I think if you can capture someone's attention for an hour or two about a topic you are pretty passionate about that's a really important skill to have.

These statements illustrate how conflict can be generated when personal beliefs clash with institutional culture and expectations, the participant expressing some reservations around integrating these new approaches and appearing to experience the 'dissonance' or disharmony suggested by Walker (2015).

Two participants reflected that their own prior learning experiences had been very teacher-centred, recognising a need to adapt their approach and providing some examples of how they have adjusted to providing student-centred activities in their current classes:

So I tried to combine expositive classes with hands-on activities from the student side as well as giving them the opportunity to talk and to present .. during the classes.

You need to facilitate learning. It's not you are directing the class, [...] facilitation is happening [...]. We release our tension of teaching .. giving the authority to the students to learn themselves.

Both acknowledged, however that international students were not necessarily comfortable with such an approach:

I would say that probably my audience, being mostly Indian students .. they are used to the old traditional way .. even more than me.

Whilst the concept of student-centred teaching was embraced positively by all participants, there was a sense that both tutor and students were navigating a new situation where their roles had evolved significantly. Participants appeared to be referencing not just their own but their students' prior learning experiences as they attempted to make sense of the challenges that they were facing in the classroom. Overall, the findings substantiated adjusting to student-centred teaching as a challenge area for international teaching staff (Balasooriya et al., 2014; Lewis, 2005; Minocha et al., 2019; Walker, 2015).

### **Professional Development**

At the time of the study, three of the four participants had recently undertaken a New Zealand adult teaching qualification. For some this was a prerequisite to promotion while for others it represented essential teacher training or even a chance to secure a more permanent position:

When I'm getting .. got the job [here] .. they asked me that since I haven't done any teaching qualifications before, you can do the teaching qualification at [this institution] and it's completely free. [...] I was getting 0.6 permanent and 0.4 fixed term role and there was no certainty of continuing the role for the next year too. So I wanted to do my qualification.

Another participant felt that the adult teaching studies had improved their intercultural awareness:

The Māori cultural aspects that they teach in those courses help me to understand society or why New Zealand is the way it is.

One participant also noted it as a valuable forum for interacting with individuals from other teaching areas:

You realise you're not the only migrant employee at [this institution] or within your department .. there are multiple people around and that's good.

One participant who has successfully completed the adult training qualification would like further opportunities to share best practice with colleagues:

I'd like to somehow compare the way I'm teaching and the way I'm applying the teaching and learning approach to others.

While participants who had engaged in the adult teaching course predominantly saw it as essential to promotion or improved employment prospects, two felt strongly that it had helped them to understand the New Zealand teaching context.

### **Curriculum Development**

All four participants have been actively involved in reshaping or innovating curriculum. Indeed, there was evidence that some of these staff have brought with them 'new' or updated subject/industry expertise from which the institution, local staff and students can benefit. This participant noted how they were using advanced knowledge in their field to innovate curriculum:

Yeh .. so it is a niche market .. so that's material that hasn't .. it's been around in New Zealand but it's needed some updating because the standards here have only just been developed [...]. That's where I fit in quite a bit in terms of the teaching curriculum for that level .. for postgrad level ..

Another commented on the mutual advantages of being able to contribute their significant knowledge of US- based models in a New Zealand environment often influenced by UK models:

I would say is not because something is not common or popular here that is not important [...], probably it is the opposite and there are some opportunities maybe. If you are the first one to know and introduce that here you can get some advantages in your career by doing that.

One participant shared how their extensive experience in accreditation will allow them to innovate and improve the value of student industry practicums:

... I've brought the industry knowledge that I had from [my country] to try and build that knowledge – accreditation of practices – where students can go and practise in an accredited environment.

Another participant notes how working in the vocational sector involves developing content and activities which equip their students for industry:

[I include] aspects like work-ready experience .. trying to simulate what they will find in the day-by-day jobs when they get them .. so work readiness, autonomy .. flexibility.

These innovations and contributions appear to be welcomed by local staff as this participant observed:

I've found [...] that they appreciate the knowledge that you bring from outside .. so it's almost like they're using what you know to try and see if it would integrate here, make the teaching better here.

The findings therefore substantiated suggestions that academic migrants can be a source of new ideas and expertise (Walker, 2015) who innovate existing delivery (Altbach & Yudkevich, 2017).

Whilst participants felt they were bringing important expertise, they were also encountering and integrating new learning into their areas of subject expertise. This teacher explains the benefits of undertaking postgraduate study, which provided knowledge about Māori and Pasifika culture and allowed them to explore their area of specialism from new cultural perspectives:

I was able to learn a lot about the health system because of the research that I was doing [...] and that's where I learnt a lot about the culture .. and the four pillars of Māori health and wellness and the aim at Māori and Pasifika wellbeing. That was very specific which I had no knowledge of.

Participants appeared to be aware of the gaps in their knowledge and were willing to integrate their professional knowledge with the new context-specific knowledge they gained. Staff appear to be beginning to operate from a broader frame of reference in terms of their field of enquiry (Mason & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2014) as they integrate new perspectives and advance their subject expertise through study and research.

## **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

This study noted that the temporary immigration status of some vocational sector academic migrants may be a significant stressor as they are adjusting to the new environment. Appropriate pastoral care should be available to international teaching staff, along with a general understanding by managers of how their allocation of teaching hours, fixed-term and proportional teaching contracts can impact on the migrant teacher's ability to renew a work permit.

This study found that undertaking a New Zealand adult teaching qualification has provided important formal learning and a supportive forum in which these participants were able to share and discuss new experiences. Staff appreciated learning about Māori culture and practices. Adjusting to a new teaching environment and learning to support more diverse student groups have created some conflicts and challenges which have caused staff to examine their worldviews and assumptions. They have shown a willingness to integrate and implement new learning and to reflect on their practice. Employers might want to examine how staff can continue this sharing and reflection over a longer period, whilst also considering those migrant teaching staff who are exempt from formal study due to holding an overseas adult teaching qualification, but who may nevertheless benefit from individual mentoring and support.

The findings highlight the extent to which these ITP sector academic migrants are participating in curriculum development in a way which is potentially new to the field. They have contributed not only new subject expertise but also practical and industry-specific knowledge which is then shaped and repositioned to the new context as they continue to engage in a range of teaching, study and research activities. Their contributions towards innovating and internationalising curriculum are undoubtedly important at a time when educational institutions are increasingly focused on turning out globally sensitive graduates (Altbach & Yudkevich, 2017; Gesche & Makeham, 2008; Hellsten, 2008; Minocha et al., 2019; Sawir, 2014) and at a time where COVID has impacted opportunities for students to travel and widen their own worlds.

These tertiary vocational sector academic migrants appear to represent their overall experience of relocation to date as a period of personal and professional growth. Whilst at the time of the study some still faced uncertainty around remaining in New Zealand, they viewed their experiences largely positively: "*Yeh .. so far so good .. the decision proves to be the right one*".

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