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Export education in the primary sector: Responsiveness, partial privatisation, or increasing cultural diversity?

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Export education in the primary sector: Responsiveness, partial privatisation, or increasing cultural diversity?

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Abstract

Aotearoa/New Zealand, like a number of other Anglo-phone countries has experienced a significant increase in international student numbers in the past decade in both the compulsory and tertiary sectors. There has also been an expeditious growth in the number of international (foreign full fee paying) students undertaking study at New Zealand primary schools with student numbers rising from 208 in 1993 to 1,682 in 2001, an increase of 709 per cent (Ministry of Education, 2001). Auckland continues to be the main destination region for international students with 67 per cent students studying in this region (ibid.). This study (in-progress at the time of abstract submission) reports the findings small-scale collaborative research projected conducted with 10 primary and intermediate schools in the greater Auckland region about the impact of international students on the workload of teachers, educational leaders and administrators of schools. Findings revealed that leaders considered the compliance issues associated with international students were high, but the additional income generated by these students was useful, and that interactions between students of different cultures was, overall, positive. Responses from teachers surveyed were mixed as to the impact on workload of hosting international students. Implications for future research in this area are advanced.

Introduction and Overview

There has been expeditious growth in the number of international students undertaking study at New Zealand primary and intermediate schools. Latest figures report that of 4,293 international students nationally, 2,332 (54.32%) studied in the greater Auckland region made up of Auckland, North Shore, Waitakere and Manukau cities (November 2003, Ministry of Education, 2003).

This study was funded through the export education levy, thus the financial contribution came from the education providers which enrol international students. This study reports the findings of a small-scale collaborative research project conducted with ten primary and intermediate schools in the greater Auckland region about the impact of international students on the workload of teachers, educational leaders and administrators of schools. Findings revealed that leaders considered the compliance issues associated with international students were very high, but the additional income generated by these students was useful. Responses from the 131 teachers surveyed were mixed as to the impact on workload of hosting international students. The research team proposed two levels of recommended changes for practice. The first involved reflections of the changes that could be implemented in practice in the local context of these schools, and the second wider national policy implications directed towards the Ministry of Education and export education industry. Implications for future research in this area are advanced, and the project concludes with final issues for consideration in relation to the future of the export education industry.

One of the major issues to emerge from the marketisation of education from the 1990s has been the idea of schools being self-managing entities. In terms of educational funding this has meant that Boards of Trustees (dealing with issues of governance) and the executive management of schools (senior management and leaders) have had to address issues of significant under-funding and be entrepreneurial in terms of generating additional income sources. One of the revenue-generating activities has been through the export education industry and the importing of 'foreign' full fee-paying international students. This article briefly outlines some of the more contentious issues in this area and also provides some evidence of a recent small-scale collaborative research endeavour on this topic.

The Asia 2000 organisation in Aotearoa/New Zealand estimates that the export education market – selling the education system to international students is a \$NZD 1.7 billion enterprise (Smith, 2003). My own university (Auckland University of Technology) has a policy of admitting up to 20 per cent of the total student population as full-fee paying international students. This increasing internationalisation appears to be a trend across the Anglophone education systems of Australia, Canada, the UK and the USA.

Whilst more prevalent in the tertiary sector, the practice of what is known as the ‘export education industry’ (increasing internationalisation) also occurs in the compulsory schooling sector in primary and secondary schools in New Zealand. At the end of 2003 there were almost 4,300 (4,293) international students studying in primary and intermediate schools in New Zealand, and of these nearly 55 per cent studied in the greater Auckland region (Ministry of Education, 2003). The currently released figures for 2004 show there has been a decline in enrolments to 3,598 (Nixon, 2004: 4), and this represents a decrease of approximately 16.2 per cent. It is also worth noting that funding for research on international students only began in 2003, after there has been a down-turn in the number of students and thereby a concomitant reduction in this important external funding source.

Another interesting observation is that whilst international students have been studying in New Zealand schools since 1992 is that there is a dearth of research as to the impact on schools in this country (for an overview of this literature see Smith, 2003; Smith, et al., 2004). The Ministry of Education (MoE) in 2001 provided three background studies two on FFFP (foreign full-fee paying) student statistics (MoE, 2001a; 2001b), and another on export education strategies (MoE, 2001c) and commissioned a literature review on the impact of international students on domestic students and host institutions (Ward, 2001). Furthermore, there has been only one empirical study of this area by the Education Review Office (ERO) in 2002 and published in 2003 (ERO, 2003). The New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI, the primary sector union) has been critical of the export education strategy noting that most of the schools that benefit are located in more wealthy areas (NZEI, 2002).

Perhaps at the outset the title of this paper requires some explanation. Given that this title and abstract were written a considerable time ago, before the actual research was completed and we had all the findings – if I was re-writing the title it would now be slightly changed. However, does the export education strategy actually reflect primary and intermediate schools being responsive to government policy and the international student market? Does it represent an intentional under-funding of this sector whereby schools need to attract additional funding however they can do so – thus topping up their coffers? Or alternatively is it about genuinely increasing the schools’ ethnic diversity? However, it was noted in the actual study the vast majority of the international students (over 90 per cent) were from a single country, South Korea.

The increasing internationalisation in Aotearoa, which prides itself of both its bi-cultural heritage and increasingly multi-cultural nature, brings both benefits and challenges to the schools involved – there is a significant impact. Increasing the number of international students poses a dilemma for some principals and their governing bodies, especially if there is a perception that it may adversely impact on both domestic and ‘indigenous’ students. Some of the benefits of internationalisation include the extra finance generated and increasing the ethnic diversity of schools. However, by contrast, some of the challenges include the perception that education is being ‘sold’, that the education system is being under-funded by central government and thereby schools are being forced into more ‘entrepreneurial’ activities taking them away from the core duties, and that some schools are disadvantaged because it is the schools located in the more desirable locations (namely in high socio-economic status areas, urban areas) that are able to attract the majority of the international students.

In New Zealand, primary schools can charge up to a maximum of \$NZD 12,000 per international student and intermediate schools up to a maximum of \$NZD 14,089 (Smith, 2003). There are schools in the greater Auckland area that host almost 100 international students (one intermediate has 98 or nearly 12 per cent of its total student population), whilst the primary school with the largest number is 81 (or 9.2 per cent of its total student number). Obviously, this extra injection of income can be a real

'boon' for the schools involved, but there is also evidence to suggest that many schools are now beginning to become reliant on this income source (see Education Review Office, 2003; New Zealand Educational Institute, 2002). This can be problematic given the volatility of the international student market especially from Asia due to instances of currency crises and phenomena such as SARS.

This paper provides details of a background study on this area, outlines a recently completed study on internationalisation in the primary sector (including the methodology, findings and recommendations) and finally concludes with challenges for further research endeavours on this important area of education. Whilst this paper is a summary of the project, another paper at this conference (see Smith, Syddall & Taylor, 2004) outlines the methodological issues and processes associated with this collaborative research.

Background information for the study

In terms of background data to the present study reported in this article, there are 300 primary and intermediate schools located in the greater Auckland region made up of Auckland, North Shore, Waitakere and Manakau cities. Of these 300 schools, 166 (55.33%) hosted international students in 2003, whilst the remaining 134 (44.66%) did not (Smith, 2004). The majority of international students were hosted in the 'high' (8-10) decile schools (43.37%), followed by 'mid' (4-7) decile schools (36.14%), whilst only approximately one fifth (20.48%) were hosted in 'low' (1-3) decile schools (Smith, 2004). By contrast, it is the majority not hosting international students were the 'low' decile schools (88 of 134, or 65.675%, Smith, 2004).

Table 1: The number and percentage of international students in primary and intermediate schools in the four cities hosting international students in 2003 (by numbers of students)

City	Total no. of schools	No. of schools with I S	%	No. I S	%
Auckland	105	53	50.04	490	21.01
North Shore	52	44	84.46	839	35.97
Waitakere	52	38	73.07	464	19.89
Manukau	91	31	34.06	539	23.11
Totals	300	166	55.33	2,332	99.98

(Source: Ministry of Education, 2003 – website)

As can be seen in Table 1 the numbers of schools in each city hosting international students is variable. Whilst almost 85 per cent of North Shore schools host international students, and almost three quarters of Waitakere schools host, just over fifty per cent of Auckland schools host, and approximately a third of schools in Manukau do. Furthermore, as can be observed in Table 1, the schools from North Shore hosted over a third of students, which was disproportionate to the number of schools in comparison to both Auckland and Manukau cities. Both Auckland and Waitakere cities hosted approximately 20 per cent each of the total international students.

Our study

I recently had the pleasure of leading a collaborative research team of eleven academic-practitioners from ten diverse primary and intermediate schools in the greater Auckland metropolitan area of Aotearoa/New Zealand. The focus of the research investigated the effects on teacher workload of hosting international ('foreign' full fee-paying) students (see Smith, et al., 2004). The project was funded by the export education initiatives and administered by the Ministry of Education/Education New Zealand Trust. Whilst the topic was worthy of investigation – and some immensely valuable research data was collected which culminated in a mammoth 100 page report - it was not the end product (the output) that was significant, but the process of the research and the links to practice.

The research was undertaken to accommodate several imperatives. These included:

1. a desire to work closely with a group of senior practitioners in a shared research endeavour (some of whom had been former students of the principal researcher);
2. to foster a closer collaboration between the academy and practice; and
3. to mentor, support and enhance the research skills of all involved in the project.

The small-scale collaborative research involved ten primary and intermediate schools in the greater Auckland region and looked at the impact of international students on the workload of teachers, educational leaders and administrators of schools.

Research procedures/methods

This research was underpinned by a commitment to ‘practitioner’ research, whereby educational research is conducted by one or more practitioner/professionals into either their own practice, or into the practices of their organisation (Wellington, 2000). Furthermore, practitioner insight may assist those from ‘outside’ with facilitating design validity, ethical integrity and a richer level of research reporting (Wellington, 2000: 20).

Research ethics were adhered to and the research team got research ethics approval to conduct the research by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEK). All of the co-researchers in this research team agreed to be named directly in this report and to use their real names and the actual names of their schools, not pseudonyms. Normally in research this would pose an ethical dilemma for the researchers, because of both anonymity and confidentiality ethical considerations, however, given the co-researcher(s) status of this endeavour, all were happy to be specifically named in this project.

The research methodology drew upon both quantitative and qualitative methods (thereby it was a mixed-methods study). The following specific research processes were employed:

1. Documentary analysis of relevant Ministry of Education literature, school documentation and the current Education Review Office reports on the institutions (May, 1997; Wellington, 2000).
2. Data were collected via: a *School Profile Data Sheet* (SPDS) was completed by all of the ten co-researchers thereby providing background information about their own school. In addition, two questionnaires were administered. The first was to teachers, administrators, principals (and APs/DPs, senior managers), English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL personnel). The second, more detailed questionnaire was administered to a nominated staff member whose responsibility was the co-ordinators of international students in the school. Each questionnaire used a blend of Likert scale questions, closed questions and open-ended (short answer responses).
3. In-depth case studies of each of the seven chosen schools.
4. Semi-structured interviews were completed with three of the other co-researchers (all principals) who were unable to participate fully in the study.

Each of the co-researchers based in schools (all were principals, associate principals or deputy principals) wrote a case study on their particular school. Templates were provided to maintain a consistent research approach and format. Questionnaires were designed based on some of the questions from the ERO (2003) report and also sourced through discussions and debate amongst the research team.

Questionnaires about hosting international students were completed by 131 teaching staff (of the 215 staff employed in the seven case study schools), this was a response rate of almost 61 per cent. In addition, a longer questionnaire was completed by a nominated staff member in each institution who was responsible for the international student portfolio. The principals of the remaining three schools in the study provided additional data in the form of interviews and written responses.

Findings

The table below provides an overview of the schools in the study noting their types, percentage of international students making up the proportion of the total rolls (in 2003-2004), the numbers of international students in 2004 and the schools' location and decile rating.

As can be seen in Table 2 the case study schools were across a range of school types, socio-economic deciles and locations. The schools involved hosted between zero to 41 international students (in 2004), and there was a slight variation in the the proportion of international students making up the total school rolls between 2003 and 2004 with most schools decreasing the numbers and thereby proportions of international students.

Table 2: The schools in the sample by name, type, percentage of international students in the school roll, location and decile.

School Name	Type	03 IS Roll	% 03*	04 IS Roll	% 04	Location	Decile
Prospect	Con Pr	1	0.20	1	0.20	Waitakere	3
Papatoetoe Central	Con Pr	0	0.00	0	0.00	Manukau	4
Manurewa South	Con Pr	11	2.38	2	0.51	Manukau	2
Campbells Bay	Con Pr	17	2.32	5	0.79	NSC	10
Glendowie	Full Pr	17	3.33	15	2.94	Auckland City	7
Colwill	Full Pr	35	7.74	35	8.41	Waitakere	4
Glenfield	Int	68	6.56	41	5.35	NSC	8
Glen Eden	Int	33	2.92	34	3.25	Waitakere	8
Farm Cove	Int	30	4.84	30	4.66	Manukau	9
Papatoetoe	Int	5	0.47	0	0.00	Manukau	3

N.B. * The source of the information on the percentage of international students as a proportion of the school roll was calculated using the number of international students recorded on the roll against the full roll in July 2003 returns. The data was sourced from the Ministry of Education current profiles on 9 December 2003. The 2004 data is directly from the schools themselves. Even though Colwill and Farm Cove schools had the same number of international students in both 2003 and 2004 they had a drop in total roll thus the percentage proportions are higher for the 2004 year.

The costs per international students studying at the schools which hosted them per year ranged between \$9,000-\$12,000 with an average of \$10,100. Whilst two schools in the study gained no income from international students in 2004, and another merely \$2,250 for one student for a term, the schools with the largest numbers of students were receiving between around \$300,000 - \$660,000 per annum. Thus, it was a very lucrative and useful source of additional income.

The research identified the two most important *benefits* from hosting international students were the increased cultural diversity aspects and the additional income that international students generated for the benefit of the whole school. It is anticipated that these findings could be generalised to most schools hosting students.

Some of the main themes identified by respondents about how the presence of international students supported learning for domestic students were 'cultural aspects and tolerance issues, motivation and role-modelling, buddying and peer tutoring and the additional finances gained allowed for additional teachers/support and a reduction in class sizes.

Some of the educational and social benefits of hosting international students included: cultural exchange and on-going contact; understanding and tolerance of ethnic relations; and changes in types of cuisine offered in the schools' tuckshop, with the addition of 'Asian' food items.

Some of the *concerns* raised by participants included behavioural and racial tensions, inequities, less teacher attention to other students, classroom language difficulties, and workload issues. One school reported that some of the Asian male students, especially the Korean ones were generally reluctant to take orders from female authority figures (CB Report, 2004: 59), however, this was not reported in other schools' case studies.

Again, it is anticipated that these general findings could be generalised to other schools in New Zealand hosting fee-paying international students. At the least, they warrant further investigation.

In terms of the issue of *teacher workload* it was reported as being 'high' for 4.5 per cent of respondents, 'somewhat high' by approximately 55 per cent of questionnaire respondents and neutral for a further almost quarter (23.66%) of respondents. However, by contrast very few staff overall, less than two per cent considered that the impact on *whole school workload* was 'extremely high' from hosting international students. It should be noted however that around 40 per cent of respondents noted it was 'somewhat high'.

Participants also observed there were some positive changes in cultural practices in their schools as a result of hosting international students. These included more cultural events reflecting the ethnic diversity of the school, more recognition of students' background, customs and food types.

Another important message from principals about *their* workload issues associated with international students were:

The onerous demands on their institutions by the Ministry of Education from the changes to the code of practice whereby the principals thought it was expensive, extensive and very demanding, taking on average some 50-60 hours to complete. Two schools in the study opted in 2003 not to continue enrolling international students because of the enormity of the task in terms of time, given the return of only hosting a few students. Some leaders noted they felt that top-down administrative changes ran counter to the self-managing philosophy of schools promoted since the *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms.

In addition, the majority of case study schools in this study (six of the eight that hosted them) were concerned about becoming reliant on this external income source.

The ethical dilemmas which surfaced during the study

Given the complexities of the multitude of competing interests and positions on the issues of 'export education' the principal researcher was hoping to be presented with some useful, more 'critical' data in terms of some of the 'ethical' dilemmas facing practitioners and school leaders/managers from hosting international students. Whilst there were some 'pockets' of critique from a few practitioners sprinkled throughout this report – (and importantly for us as co-researchers/team of researchers, from all the schools in the study) about the implications for both Maori and other domestic students, the level of critical engagement with these important issues was on the whole somewhat disappointingly low, with a few noteworthy exceptions. These are outlined below in the interviews conducted by the principal researcher with two of the co-researchers in the study.

RS: What were the ethical dilemmas facing you as educators – of hosting students ...

GR: 'No ethical issues in terms on hosting them. I note you've got here recruiting and I bet there are some ethical issues in terms of the recruiting processes involved. ... it wasn't an issue for us

but I sort of had wry smiles on some of the questions about what is the time best been spent by some colleagues in this whole process when not just ethically but legally, there are compliance requirements with us as government employees and in a state school there is focus on the primary objective. And I just can't help but think there is a little bit of chase after the pot of gold and some get a hold of it too, in many cases'.

KH: 'We had some ethical issues as I've mentioned that we didn't want to provide a space for an overseas student when we were turning our students away, so there was a bit of an ethical issue for us'.

GR: 'Arguably too ... that would be the case in every school too ... and we have an enrolment zone... that would arguably be a sustainable course of concern for any New Zealand citizen who was outside our zones but wanted to get into our schools'.

AJ: 'To accept IS students while not accepting some out-of-zone NZ students' (Smith, interviews with GR/KH and AJ, correspondence, 2004).

By contrast, one of the other co-researchers was much more open and entrepreneurial in their approach – noting that for this school they were responding to a demand and thereby provided a service, for example:

'I don't have an ethical or moral dilemma. We don't recruit, but offer a service for those who wish to avail themselves of it. We responded in the first instance to a demand' (ME, correspondence, 2004).

It is important for NZ to be "educated" to understand what is happening and why. With technology the work is smaller. Also important for the general public to understand our system is jolly good, which is why it is such a good earner! (ME, correspondence, 2004).

The position noted by one of the co-researchers is an important one, we as Aotearoa/New Zealand educationalists know the strengths of our education systems and they should be heralded, but we also know that there are some inherent dangers in 'peddling' our education system widely to international students when many domestic students still may still not be achieving to their full potential. The duality of approaches to this topic was one in which we as a research team both applauded and celebrated for a diversity of offerings in the primary/intermediate sectors.

Recommendations

At a strategic policy level, the research team made the following recommendations for the Ministry of Education and the export education sector/industry. These were:

1. Provide support to all primary and intermediate schools with international student programmes with adequate resources, professional development and key personnel (e.g. international student advisers) who would be available for first language support and counselling. (This could be done on a contract, cost recovery-basis).
2. A tiered approach to fee-setting be implemented so that the number of students in the school determines the fees levied (we recommended that in order to be cost-effective approximately ten students were required).
3. Lessen the red tape and meaningless paperwork so that institutions can spend more time meeting the educational and pastoral care needs of the international students rather than the bureaucratic requirements.
4. Promote primary education as strongly as secondary and tertiary.

There are clearly generic messages here for educators in throughout New Zealand hosting international students.

Some challenges for educationalists/researchers

Further research can better inform strategic policy directions as well as school-based decision making when it comes to the emerging challenge of internationalisation of our schools. To this end the research team recommended that, the Education New Zealand and Ministry of Education:

More adequately fund an increasing number of practitioner-based research projects on this important area of education. In particular this future research should focus on:

- a. Broadening the current study of ten schools to a larger cohort and stratified sample of the schools whereby large concentrations of international students are hosted to really ascertain the effects on teachers' workload from international students (in a larger context).
- b. Determining the extent to which schools are becoming reliant on this income source (through robust and independent research, from professional educational researchers).
- c. Determining the extent to which Maori students as tangata whenua might be unwittingly 'disadvantaged' through the export education strategy.

Such a research focus is likely to remain an important one both economically and politically as well as in the context of education for some time to come.

Conclusion

In terms of the export education industry there remains a considerable amount of research to do, especially to support those at the whiteboard-face and their school leaders. There are some increasing tensions and yet still substantial possibilities for educators in hosting international students within New Zealand schools (even in the declining market). It was the conclusion and now somewhat faint hope of the original research team in the Smith, et al. (2004) study that: the Ministry of Education/Education New Zealand (and the wider export education industry) takes seriously the issues raised by academic-practitioners- undertaking research on this vitally important area of education. It would appear however, given that the some of the agencies involved in promoting this educational and financial endeavour (and the eventual contracting agency) were not listening and whatsmore did not value constructive feedback and critique.

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