

Community engagement and study-to-work transitions: Recommendations from Asia-born New Zealand-educated business graduates

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Abstract

Asia-born New Zealand-educated business students and graduates involved in our ongoing longitudinal study identified community engagement as a key factor facilitating successful study to work transitions in New Zealand and elsewhere. Graduates noted the strategic value of social engagement for developing contacts that may know of work opportunities and/or provide positive recommendations to prospective employers. They also highlighted the value of work-related community engagement (for example, volunteer, temporary and part-time work opportunities) for providing experience, social connection, and employment-related links. Some graduates in the study had as yet been unable to gain employment. These emphasised the protective function of community engagement in facilitating a sense of wellbeing; and providing a chance to 'prove oneself', learn new skills, and gain experience. Conversely, other graduates identified a lack of community engagement as limiting their work prospects and resulting in a sense of isolation or despair.

In this paper we use 'community engagement' as a framework for outlining results from phase two of the study (conducted during 2009-2010). After reviewing some academic literature on community engagement and higher education, we describe the study to date, and discuss how community engagement (or a lack of community engagement) emerged in graduates' accounts of their study to work pathways. To conclude, we outline graduates' suggestions as to how immigration policy, higher education institutions, and business schools might more effectively foster students' community engagement both pre and post-graduation, thereby facilitating their successful study to work transitions.

Key Words

Business graduates, Asia-born students, Transition, Employment, New Zealand, Community engagement

Introduction

A key question for policymakers in many countries is how to foster community engagement among citizens. In academic literature, the term 'community engagement' is used in reference to two broad kinds of engagement: between citizens and public institutions such as governments or universities (Brown & Keast 2003; Butcher et al. 2003; Kenworthy-U'Ren, Van de Ven & Zlotkowski 2005; Narsavage et al. 2002; Winter, Wiseman & Muirhead 2006); and between citizens or sub-groups of citizens, for example, host communities and migrants, young people and adults, or students and community members (Butcher et al. 2003; Narsavage et al. 2002; Spoonley et al. 2004; Zeldin 2004). While used in widely varying ways in reference to different levels of engagement (policy, institutional, academic, occupational, and interpersonal), 'community engagement' expresses notions of democracy, citizenship, and social cohesion; how policies and practices might promote (or preclude) people's affective and functional belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition and legitimacy in a given social context (McGrath et al. 2005; also see Jenson 1998; Spoonley et al. 2004).

In this paper we examine how community engagement emerged as a factor fostering smooth study to work transitions and/or a sense of wellbeing and belonging for Asia-born New Zealand-educated business graduates involved in an ongoing longitudinal tracking study. The paper reports on phase two of the study, and extends a previous paper outlining phase one study findings (McGrath et al. 2009). After considering some literature on community engagement and higher education, we revisit the primary aims of the study and discuss our phase two research questions and research methods. We then describe the five post-graduation pathways that emerged in interview and survey data, and consider factors participants identified as supporting or limiting their post-graduation employment opportunities. We conclude by highlighting some recommendations participants made as to ways in which immigration policy and educational practices might foster students' engagement with different communities both pre- and post-graduation, promoting smooth study to work transitions in New Zealand or wherever graduates choose to live.

Community engagement and higher education

Literature on community engagement and higher education highlights the role of higher education institutions in fostering students' preparedness for work; preparing students for political, civic and social participation in their wider communities; serving their local community's research and educational needs; and providing 'service education', or work-based training that link communities, students, educational contexts and content (Narsavage et al. 2002; Winter, Wiseman & Muirhead 2006; Zlotkowski 1996, 1997). Internationalisation literature suggests a need to consider what 'community engagement' might look like in educational contexts marked by large numbers of international student enrolments; increasingly diverse 'local student' populations; transnationally mobile graduates; and globally interconnected social, economic and environmental concerns (Haigh 2002; Jiang 2005; Jones 1998; Madge, Raghuram & Noxolo 2009; Rizvi 2004, 2006; Robertson 2006; Singh 1998). However, some critical scholars trouble straightforward notions of both 'community' and 'engagement'. For example, they suggest that notions of 'community' are reliant on homogenisation; the downplaying of disparate historical, social, and everyday realities and delineation of insider/outsider boundaries (Ang 2003; Hall 1996; Lugones 2003; Noble 2002, 2005; Winter, Wiseman & Muirhead 2006). Likewise, they suggest that attempts to 'engage' with 'others' are not necessarily innocent, but connected with colonising, assimilatory, and dominating policies and practices (Ang 2003; Bishop 2005; Mohanty 1991, 2006; Smith 1999). As Jenson (1998, p. 5) highlights, calls to foster engagement (or in her words, to increase "social cohesion") arise from the perception that a problem exists or more specifically a "package of threats": for example, unequal wealth distribution, the disconnection from or disenchantment of particular groups with policymakers and those in positions of political power; and/or antagonism between particular groups of people. However it is understood, the notion of 'community engagement' raises (at least) four questions: what do we mean by 'community'; which community or communities are we referring to; what do we mean by engagement; and engagement between (or with) whom?

This paper considers the ways in which Asia-born New Zealand-educated students and graduates alluded to community engagement in relation to their study to work transition pathways. Throughout the paper, we use the term in its broadest sense, in reference to engagement or connection between people at multiple levels: interpersonal, professional and transnational.

Background to the study

The demographic context for our study is described in our previous paper (McGrath et al. 2009). In brief, students identifying as 'Asian' constitute about a third of Bachelors-level enrolments in New Zealand business programmes and of these, about 40 percent are international students. In addition, Asian students represent the strongest increase in domestic education enrolments across all qualification types in the New Zealand higher education sector (Badkar & Tuya 2010). Engagement with resident New Zealanders is often an explicit but elusive aim for Asian international students (Berno & Ward 2003; Deloitte 2008; Ho et al. 2007). Research highlights a level of historically-grounded suspicion in New Zealand towards visible (non-'white'?) international student and migrant populations alike (Collins 2006; Ip 1995; McGrath et al. 2005; Ward et al. 2005). At the same time, New Zealand policy discourses and research funding provision reveals recognition of the strategic value of engagement with Asian communities and Asian people in

New Zealand, particularly given New Zealand's position as a potential trade partner to growing Asian economies (for example, see McGrath, Stock & Butcher 2007; Ministry of Education 2007).

A recent Department of Labour report is useful for contextualising our phase two study findings and highlighting some factors that may limit Asian people's engagement with employment opportunities in New Zealand (Badkar & Tuya 2010). The report reveals that Asian people in New Zealand are youthful and highly skilled (reflecting current immigration policy); and overall, two times more likely than the national average to have a bachelors degree or higher. However, in 2006, almost half of the Asian working-age population in New Zealand were employed in "semi-skilled/elementary occupations" and Asian working-age people with bachelors degrees were three times more likely to be working as Clerks than the national average (p. 29). The report authors note that "many Asians are over-qualified for the types of jobs they are employed in and may not be fully utilising their skills" (p. 29). Further evidence to support their claim includes the over-representation of Asian people in New Zealand retail, service and sales sectors. Suggested barriers to community engagement through employment include employer discrimination, particularly against North Asian people, and the need for new migrants and young people to find entry-level jobs where "there are no obvious barriers in terms of qualification recognition, language and New Zealand work experience" (p. 32).

Although Spoonley et al. (2004, p. 101) do not use the term 'community engagement' as such, their overview of international literature on "social cohesion and inclusion/exclusion" is instructive in terms of this paper. They suggest that a tendency to "place economic indicators as central in any policy assessment framework" and to focus on macro-level, quantitative indicators in relation to social cohesion is inadequate, since cohesion can be read as occurring (or not occurring) at multiple levels (including at a micro-level) and as shaped by multiple policies (social, economic and employment) as well as attitudinal or perceptual factors (p. 101). Spoonley et al. argue for an indicator framework that considers the interplay between social policy, economic policy and employment policy; and the role of attitudes, access to opportunities, perceptions and barriers in shaping/being shaped by these (p. 101). Their suggestion informs how we read participants' accounts in this paper. While our research focus was on Asia-born, New Zealand-educated business students' post-graduation study to work transitions, we recognise that 'engagement' in the form of employment is situated within and shaped by broader inter-related kinds of engagement and disengagement. Our aim in this paper is to highlight the different kinds of 'community' and 'engagement' participants discussed and how these shaped their study to work transitions and sense of wellbeing. Our recommendations suggest ways in which multi-levelled understandings of 'community engagement' could inform measures aimed at facilitating Asia-born New Zealand-educated business graduates' wellbeing, employment opportunities (in New Zealand and elsewhere), and connections with New Zealand businesses.

Study overview

Our study was commissioned in August 2008 by the Asia New Zealand Foundation (Asia:NZ), and involves tracking Asia-born New Zealand-trained business graduates' study to work transitions longitudinally over three years. Its overarching goal can be seen as concerned with issues of community engagement: to examine the role that Asia-born New Zealand-trained business graduates play in the development of New Zealand-Asia business relationships. Participants include Asia-born business students and graduates who are in their final year of study or have recently graduated. Participants were initially recruited to the study through participating New Zealand business schools, student networks, and peer referral, and were invited to join a survey or an interview panel, or both if they preferred.¹ Data collection is based on repeat online surveys and in-depth interviews over three years (2009-2011). Although our aim is to track as many students as possible through their study to work transitions, as with all longitudinal studies, attrition is a major consideration. For this reason, despite being a 'tracking study', recruitment is ongoing.

Interviews are summarised and in some cases, audio-taped, and interview summaries returned to interviewees for member-checking. After each of the first two phases of the study, survey results were entered into a participant database and analysed descriptively, with demographic data and participants' responses collated in relation to the broad survey questions and the primary aims of the project. Interview data was analysed inductively: coded in relation to the aims of the project, interview questions, relevant literature, and emergent themes. Contradictory or complicating data was also identified in participants' interview accounts, to be examined in repeat surveys and follow-up interviews.

The first phase of the study examined the perspectives of final-year Asia-born business students studying in New Zealand in relation to four questions: why they chose to study business; why they chose to study in New Zealand; how they had experienced living and studying in New Zealand to date; and what their expectations were for the future. Phase one data was from interviews with 40 final-year students and new graduates and 131 students or new graduates completed the online survey. Findings highlighted the significance of different kinds of interpersonal engagements in promoting New Zealand as a study destination and supporting students' emerging career pathways. Three questions that emerged from phase one research findings informed phase two of the study:

- how well are students' expectations realised post-graduation;
- what is the role of existing relationships in graduates' ongoing transition to work; and
- what role do graduates play in developing and maintaining New Zealand-Asia relationships?

The second and third question can be read as explicitly concerned with interpersonal or transnational engagement.

Phase two data-collection took place from October 2009 to March 2010. By the end of March (our cut-off time for phase two data analysis), 45 participants had completed the online survey (including 37 graduates) and 31 participants had been interviewed (including 23 graduates). Although our phase two survey panel was considerably reduced, our interview panel had remained fairly stable, with all but three interviewees having been involved in the study since its inception. Participants represented all levels of tertiary study. Their birth countries broadly paralleled those evident in available statistics on Asian international students, with People's Republic of China (PRC)-born students dominating in both survey and interview panels.² Phase two participants were based mostly in New Zealand, although five of the interviewees and seven survey panel members were based in their birth countries (Malaysia, Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan, and the PRC). As in phase one of the study, New Zealand-based participants were located in both of New Zealand's main islands, although the majority were in the North Island. Sixteen (21 percent) of the 76 participants were still studying, mostly in postgraduate programmes. The remainder identified with one of five post-graduation pathways:

- degree-related employment in New Zealand (22 participants or 30 percent);
- degree-related employment elsewhere (seven participants or nine percent);
- temporary, part-time, or volunteer work in New Zealand (15 participants, or 20 percent);
- temporary or part-time work elsewhere (two participants, or three percent); or
- unemployment (11 participants, or 14 percent).³

Our phase two report (forthcoming) describes participants' post-graduation employment pathways in detail. Our primary focus here is on the ways in which participants spoke about engagement or a lack of engagement with communities or community members (however defined) in relation to their post-graduation employment pathways. We are also interested in the ways in which participants envisaged themselves as potentially able to foster Asia-New Zealand engagement, and in the recommendations for policy and education that their accounts suggest.

Community engagement and participants' post-graduation pathways

Engagement as an 'assisting factor'

Phase two participants highlighted three key factors they saw as facilitating pathways to meaningful employment. These were: the development of interpersonal and other employment-related skills; engagement with prospective employers through volunteer or other work experience; and social engagement that fostered strategic and helpful connections. Unemployed participants highlighted how engagement in the form of volunteer work offered an affective sense of social connection and continued skill development opportunities.

Interpersonal and other employment-related skills

Jenson (1998) suggests that 'social cohesion' is linked to 'social capital'. While noting that different scholars understand this term differently, she connects it to the idea of "collective activities" or civil society where "investments...are made in maintaining community infrastructure and services"; the "embeddedness of individuals... in social networks" (p. 26); and how (private and public) institutional practices promote inclusion and belonging. Social cohesion is also shaped by people's 'cultural capital' (Jenson 2002); how their "internalised and evidenced skills, knowledges, bodily dispositions, intuitions, capacities and so forth" facilitate participation in social and employment networks or public institutions in a given social setting (Luke 2004, p. 1429).

Phase two participants highlighted the importance of having personal attributes likely to facilitate connection in order to gain employment. For example, Jane,⁴ a finishing Masters student from the PRC cautioned against students "focus[ing] on study too much", suggesting that this may limit their "practical and communication ability" or ability to engage with others. She remarked that in contrast, "those who focus on holistic ability are okay in finding jobs". Seven graduate interviewees emphasised the importance of 'holistic ability' for gaining employment both in New Zealand and in other contexts. Their comments were remarkably similar regardless of location. Miki, a Japanese returnee said, "Companies today are looking for confidence, social skills, decision-making skills and English skills"; and Patrick, a New Zealand-based graduate said, "Having a degree is necessary but not sufficient. Other important factors that are helpful in one's career prospects include good communication skills, the ability to learn fast and adaptability to change". Most phase two interviewees spoke well of their New Zealand business degree ("It's like a brand name that employers and the immigration will recognise"), but like Jane, eight saw it as a foundation for employment that was insufficient in itself. One accounting graduate who had been successful in finding degree-related employment reflected that although it's "hard to get a job without a degree, without theoretical knowledge", her degree had not prepared her for engagement with the world of work outside the academy. She noted the importance of gaining practical experience alongside (or as part of?) academic qualifications, saying, "My education is about as much equivalent to a little finger. I thought I knew a lot. I don't know anything other than the basics. I'm lacking in practical experience".

Luke (2004) extends the notion of 'cultural capital' to 'intercultural capital': "the capacity to engage in acts of knowledge, power and exchange across time/space divides and social geographies, across diverse communities, populations and epistemic stances" (p. 235, also see Lam 2006). Graduate returnees (in the PRC, Japan and Malaysia) alluded to the desirability of their skills as people with business qualifications from an English-speaking country and "local knowledge" as a basis for employment. For example, Peter, an accounting and law graduate working with a large

multinational company in Kuala Lumpur, remarked that since few overseas-educated Malaysians return 'home', those who do so are highly prized by multinational corporations for their local knowledge and overseas education. He said "They are like gold to the company", able to understand local issues and engage with the international business community.

Volunteer or other work experience

Thirteen of the 31 phase two interviewees described volunteer or other work experience as likely to increase a student or graduate's employability; by fostering engagement with prospective employers and promoting the development of work-related skills. The importance of work-related experience was also reflected in participants' survey responses, with 91 percent of survey participants agreeing or strongly agreeing that past work experience made it easier to obtain degree-related employment. This resonates with the arguments in service learning literature, that work experience in community contexts (including volunteering) benefits both the work experience provider and the worker themselves, promoting the worker's wellbeing; teamwork, flexibility and communication skills; and educational and occupational success (Butcher et al. 2003; Zlotkowski 1996). In other words, volunteer and other work experience may promote the development of both cultural and social capital, by promoting the development of a person's context-specific knowledge, skills etc. and facilitating their embeddedness in social and vocational networks (see Jenson 1998, earlier).

Interviewees described volunteer and other work experience as providing opportunities to prove oneself, gain experience, obtain references, gain confidence, become familiar with work environments, and feel fruitfully occupied even if unemployed. In addition, for some interviewees, volunteer, part-time, or temporary work had led to part-time, full-time and/or permanent employment. John, a New Zealand-based graduate from South India, reflected that having volunteered for his current employer, he was a "'known quantity'... they didn't have to look for somebody [else] to take over from the previous [person]". Wen Bing, formerly from the PRC and now in New Zealand-based permanent employment stated that her "part-time job experience and degree" had together allowed her to obtain her current position. She alluded to her previous work experience as having facilitated her development of the skills necessary to engage with customers in her workplace:

Some of my previous part time jobs helped me to learn customer relations and to know how to connect with them. Talking to customers is often the breaking point for what they want and how to break the ice [with them].

Similarly, Kitoka, a Japanese returnee, suggested that the practical (work experience) component of her New Zealand business qualification along with her increased ability in English had likely made her an attractive candidate to her employers in the Japanese hospitality industry. Kitoka suggested that work experience does not only foster context-specific skills and connections, but also the development of skills that are transferable across contexts.

Ron, a former international student from the PRC, was unemployed at the time of his interview, but suggested that volunteer work offers benefits besides promoting future employment. Although Ron expressed little optimism about his career future, he stated that volunteering each week to assist a former home-stay host family with computer-related issues gave him "a good feeling" and "something to do".

Social or personal contacts

Ten of the 31 phase two interviewees, described interpersonal engagement as having helped them gain employment (whether temporary, permanent, part or full time, and in New Zealand or elsewhere). Contacts included family members (who facilitated access to an existing family business), lecturers or professors (who provided references and offered career-related advice), and social contacts (who facilitated employment opportunities and offered advice). Conversely, some graduate or prospective returnees expressed concerns about the possibility that overseas study may have removed them from social networks for long enough to jeopardise job prospects at 'home'. For example, Zhen Wen, alluded to social networking or *Guan-Xi* as a basis for gaining career opportunities in the PRC (Gill 2010), and suggested that by studying in New Zealand she had disengaged from her former community networks:

To be able to do anything in China really depends a lot on relationship. While I have been away from there for a long time (since 2001), I have already lost time and chances in building friendships.

Interestingly, Joy, a PRC-born New Zealand-based graduate, suggested that community networks are also strategically important for job seekers in New Zealand. She advised job-seekers to:

Look for job recommendations. Have more skill than you think may be necessary... Be active job hunting or at work where your performance can be observed in temporary work or as a volunteer. Let people know you or your skills; even your personality. *Know a lot of people* (emphasis added).

Lack of engagement as a barrier to employment

Participants cited several barriers that they perceived as limiting their employment opportunities in New Zealand or in other countries. The first was "lack of experience"; for five interviewees, in New Zealand; and two, in the PRC. While almost half of the interviewees highlighted volunteer or other work experience opportunities as helpful in obtaining employment (see above), two interviewees described having had difficulty finding volunteer work opportunities in New Zealand. Joy, a permanent resident who was formerly from the PRC, recalled being told "don't bother" when she offered to volunteer for a company after several unsuccessful job applications. Similarly, Ron recalled having been told,

“Don’t call us, we’ll call you”. Some interviewees noted that their educational institutions did not proactively facilitate internship opportunities likely to lead to work, and five interviewees described their education institution’s career services as “superficial” or unhelpful.

The second most frequently cited perceived barrier to employment was being seen as “Asian” or “foreign” in the New Zealand context (five interviewees). Mei Lan, a Permanent Resident formerly from the PRC, suggested that Asian people in New Zealand face barriers to community engagement, saying “Asian people need to have more than a local person” in order to be seen as employable. This highlights a dilemma of ‘community engagement’: as Jenson (1998) argues, cohesive (or tightly engaged) communities can be exclusive, marked by suspicion towards those perceived to be outsiders and a reluctance to engage with ‘others’ (also see Hall 1996). Interviewees differed in their explanations for employers’ reluctance to engage with or employ Asian employees. Daisy described it as “natural”: “Local employers prefer locals. It’s the reality and psychology of it...The situation can’t be changed because it’s natural”. Another interviewee refused to describe New Zealand employers’ apparent preferences as “natural”; emphasising instead New Zealand’s broader migrant recruitment policy, which (he argued) reveals a superficial desire for engagement marked by discrimination and narrow economic self-interest: “New Zealand still has a bias against foreigners. It attracts foreigners to replace skill shortages not looking at the unique advantage of the new people coming”.

As Jenson (1998) also notes, economic crises can erode social cohesion, increasing marginal groups’ vulnerability to unemployment. Three interviewees and almost 60 percent of survey participants cited the economic recession as a barrier to degree-related employment, and 90 percent of survey participants agreed or strongly agreed that “the job market is very competitive”. One interviewee linked the recession with New Zealand employers’ apparent preference for “kiwi” employees, saying: “Because of recession, employers choose kiwis first. I understand as I have no background and there is a barrier to communication”.

Engagement with local and transnational communities

Interviewees alluded to two levels of engagement with New Zealand and New Zealanders. These were clearly inter-related. The first was at an interpersonal level, and the second, as an explicit basis for business or trading.

Interpersonal Connections

Many interviewees connected their thoughts on actual or potential Asia-New Zealand business engagement to interpersonal connection with New Zealanders or an affective sense of affinity with New Zealand. Sharon, who described how she had been promoting New Zealand in Taiwanese educational contexts, explained her willingness to do so in the following way: “I feel more attached to New Zealanders. I am keen to link up with [them]. I feel I know them well – ‘hey bro, kia ora’ feels good. I am half Kiwi... I plan to keep building relationships”. Three survey participants expressed a sense of gratitude as shaping their ongoing intentions to maintain connections with New Zealanders. Li Li and Jane, post-graduate students from the PRC, linked a sense of gratitude explicitly to their business-related intentions. Jane remarked, “I love New Zealand and hope one day I will have the ability to reward NZ”, and Li Li:

I am grateful to the New Zealand government for the opportunity to study, and my gratitude shows in recommending my future work. I will use that better understanding in policy suggestions around how to strengthen [the New Zealand-PRC] relationship.

Zadili, whose company was distributing New Zealand-made kayaks in Malaysia, linked interpersonal engagement (or specifically, a sense of “chemistry”) with the development of successful intercultural or transnational business engagement. Noting that disparate cultural and linguistic backgrounds can be a barrier to interpersonal engagement he identified the value of shared interests (in his case, sport) as a basis for both an affective sense of connection and ongoing business relationships. He said, “Sporting is a way to build relationships, to cross cultures for business”.

Notably, several interviewees described their sense of engagement with New Zealand and New Zealanders as having developed over time and more specifically, through employment. For example, in contrast with her comment above, Jane stated that initially she had not found New Zealanders to be open or friendly. Mohammad stated that having grown to understand New Zealanders better he liked them more. Six of the seven interviewees who had obtained degree-related employment in New Zealand described a sense of engagement with others in their workplace environments. For example, Patrick described his colleagues as friendly and “easy to get along with”, and Joy, as “a big family”. Wen Bing noted the positive effects of proactive management practices that promoted cooperation and collegiality. Mary and Li Ling related positive employment experiences with a shift in their perceptions of (other) New Zealanders. Although in the previous phase of the study, Li li had indicated a desire to return to China, during her phase two interview, she said, “Now I have totally changed my perspective. I like living and working in New Zealand”.

Noble (2005, p. 113-114) suggests that in order to feel “at home” in a place we must experience a sufficient “sense of safety” or “attachment to a place or context that makes acting in that setting possible”. This relates to Jenson’s (1998, p. 26) definition of ‘social capital’ as “the embeddedness of individuals and households in social networks” (citing Putnam 2003). Jenson links ‘embeddedness’ to opportunities for employment, suggesting that employment facilitates economic participation, inclusion in social networks, and social cohesion. However, Derick, an employed Philippino graduate and New Zealand citizen involved in our study provided an important cautionary note. In his previous interview Derick had

described “white” New Zealanders as generally “less accommodating” than Asian people, and as more difficult to actively engage with: “It is hard to make friends with white people. I feel that there is a barrier that needs breaking”. In his second interview, Derick stated, “It’s better, but not way, way better”, and described an ongoing sense of unease in his relationships with (other) New Zealanders despite having obtained meaningful employment. While acknowledging some sense of progress (“I’m getting on better with my workmates - a more professional relationship sort of friendship”) Derick admitted feeling a limited sense of ‘fit’ within the workplace. He said, “I’m not sure if I belong and am uncertain of my workmates”.

Business connections

The phase two survey asked participants to identify ways in which their current position might contribute in the immediate or long term to transnational engagement; specifically, “the development of business relationships with an Asia-New Zealand aspect”. Of the twelve participants who responded to this question, seven responded affirmatively. Answers were wide-ranging and related to working in Asia-based businesses, New Zealand-based businesses, between both locations (in an advisory/consultative capacity), and external to business per se. Examples included:

1. providing New Zealand-related advice to Asia-based businesses (for example, concerning the New Zealand regulatory environment or cultural aspects);
2. sharing New Zealand expertise with Asia-based businesses (for example, expertise in benchmarking and logistics);
3. acting as a kind of business ‘translator’, or providing advice to both Asia and New Zealand-based companies on areas of potential conflict or cultural misunderstanding (for example, health and safety requirements);
4. providing Asia-related services to New Zealand-based companies (for example, language services); and
5. working to promote understanding and exchange in educational contexts (for example, by organising conferences, exhibits etc.; recruiting Asian students to New Zealand universities; and providing meaningful support to Asian students in New Zealand).

Just over half of the interview panel participants indicated that they were already involved in promoting some kind of link between Asia and New Zealand in a business or work-related capacity, or that they saw potential for promoting or being involved in developing such links. Interviewees’ responses fell into the same categories as survey responses (above), with three additional categories. These were:

6. developing actual New Zealand-Asia business relationships (for example, through the distribution of New Zealand-made kayaks in Malaysia, research examining marketing possibilities for New Zealand wines in the PRC, and exploring leather trade possibilities);
7. providing accessible, culturally-appropriate service to Asian people in New Zealand in a business capacity; and
8. promoting New Zealand-Asia business relationships at a government or policy level.

Wen Bing was employed in a customer service and sales position, and highlighted the significant service Asia-born New Zealand-trained business graduates can provide to businesses in New Zealand (category 7, above) both through the strength of their social networks and their cultural/linguistic skills. She said:

I brought my network to the shop...They came and made some purchase. In time there is a potential to build. I am happy to serve people from Asia. I feel I can do better with them. Some don’t have great English. I can get them the help they need to decide what they want.

In terms of promoting New Zealand-Asia business relationships at a government or policy level (category 8), Li Li highlighted the possibilities for transnational engagement when top New Zealand-educated graduates gain employment in Asia-based public service positions. As an NZAID scholar bonded to return to her provincial government job in the PRC post-graduation, she indicated that she would likely be promoted to a senior staff position upon her return. Li Li described her work as involving managing business macro planning, including establishing a close relationship between her province and the New Zealand dairy industry. Commenting on New Zealand’s desire to expand its business relationships with the PRC, she said:

My province is now gaining importance as a pivot to link China cooperation with ASEAN countries...When I come back to China I will contribute synergy organisation around economic cooperation, ASEAN, my province, and New Zealand. This helps all round.

Notably, of the 16 interviewees who stated that they could see potential or had already developed business-related links between Asia and New Zealand, 11 spoke in terms of potentialities and possibilities. This not only highlighted participants’ openness to fostering engagement between Asia and New Zealand, but also their knowledge and creativity in seeing how and in what ways engagement might be possible.

Fostering community engagement: Recommendations for policy and education

Three key recommendations emerged in participants’ accounts as to ways in which policy and educational practices in New Zealand could better facilitate Asia-born, New Zealand-educated business students and graduates’ engagement with/in New Zealand communities and capacity to promote engagement between Asia and New Zealand. The first was to ensure flexibility in post-graduation visa processes for those who do not already have permanent residency or citizenship status; the second, to proactively promote work experience opportunities for students and graduates and

assistance with finding work; and the third, to ensure that degree programme content reflects the transnational, diverse contexts in which graduates are likely to work.

Ensure flexibility in post-graduation visa processes

Phase two participants' accounts revealed the anomalies and dangers associated with tight (or arbitrary?) immigration-related definitions of degree-related work. For example, Wei Bi, a former international student who wanted to gain a New Zealand work visa, was forced to give up a full-time, high-level management position which Immigration New Zealand deemed unrelated to his degree. In contrast, some post-graduate participants were granted work visas for clerical-type positions that were evidently deemed to be 'degree-related'. While international students spoke appreciatively of New Zealand's one-year Graduate Work Search Programme that allows international students a year after graduating to look for a 'degree-related' (work visa eligible) job, they also noted the time taken to process applications and the stress of looking for such work while also working part-time or trying to find work experience in a challenging economic climate. Wen Bing described her sense of pressure this way:

It's so frustrating but I can't do anything about it. It feels like I'm sitting on a spiky carpet – I feel like I'm wasting my time. I have to find both a part-time and full-time job at the same time as I need part-time work to help me live.

Rachel, a former international student from the PRC had obtained permanent residency visa status after working in an illegal and exploitative employment situation courtesy of an unscrupulous immigration agent. Although, having become a permanent resident, she had attained her objective, during phase two of the interview, Rachel was unemployed by choice.

Our phase two data suggests that relying too heavily on rigid definitions of work (as degree-related or not) as a basis for determining visa eligibility might hinder new graduates' participation in meaningful work. Many graduates (including those born in New Zealand) take entry-level or slightly tangential positions as a stepping stone to reach their degree-related aspirations, and given the broad content of New Zealand business qualifications, it is difficult to determine which work is degree-related and which is not. Further, and as many phase two graduate participants emphasised, higher education qualifications are not just about a particular content area or discipline, but also the development of generic human skills (including the ability to communicate well, think critically, be flexible and evaluate evidence). In this sense, many jobs are degree-related that might not fall within tight disciplinary parameters. Wei Bi and Rachel's accounts provided two important cautions: inflexible definitions of (desirable) degree-related work might result in highly-skilled graduates' disengagement (or decision to move elsewhere); and/or increase graduates' vulnerability to exploitative or illegal employment practices.

Proactively promote work experience opportunities and assistance with finding work

Participants identified engagement with others as a key factor assisting them to find employment. As noted, they described different kinds of engagement, with lecturers, who provided advice or references; friends, who provided advice, suggestions and encouragement; family members, who owned businesses and could provide work opportunities, links to other business owners, and/or economic support; actual or potential business collaborators; agencies or educational institutions that brokered internship, volunteering or mentoring opportunities; and prospective employers/community agencies willing to 'take on' a student or graduate on a provisional (internship or volunteer) basis. Participants described relationships as crucial to 'doing business' both in New Zealand and in other countries; for example, as a basis for social networking in the PRC, and 'proving oneself' in New Zealand.

Phase two findings suggest that business schools would do well to proactively facilitate supportive professional connections for senior students; for example, through internship or volunteer work opportunities, mentoring programmes, or work experience placements. Participants whose business schools did not facilitate work experience opportunities highlighted this as a major lack, while most students who had such experiences expressed a sense of optimism about their future work prospects or linked their work experience to employment success. Participants also emphasised the importance of their educational institutions offering meaningful career guidance and job search support to all students, not just "superficial blah blah" (as one graduate described the support he had received).

Ensure that degree programme content reflects the diversity of graduates' likely work contexts

When asked to comment on their New Zealand business qualification, participants' responses stressed the need for business programmes that promote students' development as people (not just as academics), since communicative ability, adaptability, flexibility and excellent social skills are highly prized by employers worldwide. They noted the need to explicitly link theory with practice or to ensure that students understand how theoretical ideas play out in real contexts. They also suggested a need to ensure the relevance of course content beyond New Zealand. For example, one employed survey participant remarked: "I learnt a lot from uni but in some ways [what I learnt is] useless in my own country". Another noted that his/her programme had emphasised business cases exclusively from the New Zealand, Australia and Pacific region, and suggested that a wider variety of cases might have been useful given graduates' likely transnational mobility.

Discussion

‘Community engagement’ appeared in at three levels in our phase two interview and survey data: in relation to interpersonal connections with New Zealanders or an affective sense of belonging in New Zealand; engagement with prospective or actual employers, colleagues, and professional communities in New Zealand and Asia; and actual or potential transnational (Asia-New Zealand) connections, whether social, business-related or both. In terms of our overarching research goal (to examine the role that Asia-born New Zealand-trained business graduates play in the development of New Zealand-Asia business relationships), community engagement emerged as both a cause and an effect. Participants who spoke enthusiastically about fostering engagement (between New Zealand and Asia) on a broader scale described a sense of affective connection to or engagement with New Zealand and New Zealanders. Participants described voluntary work and work experience as promoting opportunities for economic participation and engagement with local and professional communities. Participants engaged in meaningful employment were more likely to express a sense of connection with or liking for New Zealanders.

Participants’ suggestions as to how they could foster Asia-New Zealand connections through their involvement in business employment fell into three broad categories. These are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Possibilities participants identified for fostering New Zealand-Asia engagement

In Asia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing New Zealand-related advice to businesses • sharing New Zealand expertise • promoting New Zealand-Asia business relationships at policy or government level
In a ‘bridging’ capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing advice to both Asia and New Zealand-based companies on areas of potential conflict or cultural misunderstanding • working to promote understanding and exchange in educational contexts • developing New Zealand-Asia business (trade) relationships
In New Zealand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing companies with Asia-related services • providing Asian clients with accessible, culturally-appropriate services

Participants’ suggestions transcended a ‘local’-‘global’ distinction, indicating that New Zealand would do well to recognise the multi-faceted social and professional networks, experiences, knowledge and skills or ‘intercultural capital’ (Luke, 2004) of many Asia-born, New Zealand-educated business students and graduates. While possessing cultural capital may make it easier to become embedded in social networks and engaged with/in a given community, the intercultural capital of transnational, transcultural students and graduates offers tremendous potential for developing new forms of transnationally-connected networks or broader understandings of ‘community’ (Lam 2006; Luke 2004). Although the data discussed in this paper remains preliminary and participants’ suggestions (above) were mostly about potentialities rather than actualities, their insights and suggestions nevertheless indicate an urgent need to think about the ways in which “diversity can be leveraged as a global resource to enhance young people’s future contributions as workers, citizens, and intercultural bridges in an interdependent world” (Lam 2006, p. 228).

Some practical suggestions are included in this paper. Although these are drawn from research with Asia-born New Zealand-educated business graduates, they could be seen as having relevance beyond this group to business graduates or graduates generally. The first is the need for immigration policy that takes a ‘pathways’ approach to international graduate employment, recognising that graduates’ potential contribution as engaged community members depends partly on their safe and flexible access to meaningful employment likely to foster engagement. In this regard, tight definitions of ‘degree-related’ employment may be problematic given that many graduates may need to take ‘stepping-stone’ employment on the way to realising their career potential. Rigid definitions of ‘degree-related’ employment can also be seen as problematic since many business programmes explicitly foster graduates’ transferable interpersonal and business-related skills, not just their acquisition of discipline-specific knowledge.

The second suggestion is the need for business schools to proactively foster students’ opportunities for engagement with prospective employers and professional communities of practice. This may be through internship or work placement opportunities; the development of business-student mentoring networks; course content that explicitly illuminates connections between theory and practice; and/or meaningful, practical careers or job search guidance and support. Attempts to build connections between professional communities and business programmes are likely to offer desirable outcomes for students, business schools and professional partners alike, as business schools ensure that their course content relates to the ‘real world’, business partners gain access and exposure to new ideas and theoretical debates, and graduates develop business connections and understandings of how theory relates to practice.

The third suggestion is the need for business schools and higher education institutions to recognise their graduates’ likely transnational mobility and need for preparation to engage with professional and local communities in many parts of the world. Although he writes in relation to geography teaching, Haigh (2002) highlights several levels at which courses and programmes could be ‘internationalised’ with graduate mobility in mind. These are:

- at classroom level, through the use of teaching content that relates to many different contexts (for example, business cases from many parts of the world);
- at course level, through
 - a 'consumer protection' that openly declares of a course's non-transferability,
 - teaching approaches that recognise and respond to students' multiple identities,
 - multi-lingual instruction and assessment practices, or
 - the proactive adjustment of course content to avoid disadvantaging or advantaging 'international' or 'local' students;
- at departmental level, through international activities including staff exchanges, and the provision of proactive support systems that promote students' inclusion and sense of connection to a broader 'student community'; and/or
- at university or institutional level, by ensuring connection between students' (and graduates') perspectives and key university policies or mission statements.

Finally, graduates involved in our study who had not experienced smooth study-to-work transitions highlighted the potential implications of disengagement. At a personal level, Ron's failure to find either paid employment or formal volunteer work left him feeling "tired" and "hopeless". The refusal of Immigration New Zealand to recognise Wei Bi's logistics management position as 'degree-related' prompted him to consider working elsewhere. At a broader level, other interviewees expressed bitterness and/or frustration about New Zealand's changeable 'skill shortage' lists and apparent attempts to fill labour market gaps by attracting skilled foreigners while apparently refusing to recognise their human needs and multifaceted skills. Wesley's (2009, p. 1) warning from the Australian context could be equally applied to New Zealand: "Students who return to their countries [or leave New Zealand] with negative experiences could become a poisoned alumni, conveying critical attitudes in other countries about [New Zealand] society and poor impressions about [New Zealand] education". Asia-born New Zealand-educated business graduates' interpersonal and/or professional disengagement risks fostering broader transnational disengagement, or at the very least, represents lost opportunities for engagement on both a local and a transnational scale.

¹ For more details on our initial participant recruitment, the business schools involved, and our research methods, see our phase one report (<http://www.asianz.org.nz/sites/asianz.dev.boost.co.nz/files/Asia%20NZ%20Tracking%20Study.pdf>).

² The majority of international students identifying as 'Asian' in New Zealand tertiary education institutions are from the PRC, at just over 43 percent (see http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/tertiary_education/participation). It is impossible to comment on how the birth countries or our phase two participants reflect the birth countries of Asia-born business students generally, since no combined statistics on (New Zealand and international) business students' countries of birth are available.

³ These numbers do not quite add up to 100 percent (76 participants) because the remainder were engaged in other occupations (e.g. full-time parenthood or military service).

⁴ All participants are identified using pseudonyms.

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