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HOMECOMING: REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

AN INVESTIGATION OF NEW ZEALAND TRAINED GRADUATES RETURNING HOME TO SINGAPORE, MALAYSIA AND INDONESIA.

A thesis presented in [partial] fulfilment for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Development Studies at Massey University

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to discover and describe how International Graduates experience and adjust to their home country upon re-entry.

Sixty seven graduates of New Zealand Universities were interviewed. Twenty eight in Singapore, twenty five in Malaysia and fourteen in Indonesia. The interviews were conducted face to face without undue time constraints. The first phase of each interview was non-directed and simply asked the graduate to describe their experiences of leaving New Zealand and re-entering their home society. In the second phase, the graduate was directed to comment on their experience in the light of the general categories of graduate re-entry adjustment listed in the rather sparse literature on the subject. The first phase elicited information relating to graduate re-entry adjustment from the viewpoint and perceptions of the graduates themselves. Each had a unique experience of re-entry. In the second phase interviewees covered the full range of adjustments mentioned in the literature on graduate re-entry, but the categories listed proved to be indicative rather than exhaustive and some categories featured very little in the lives of interviewees.

What stood out in this study were three areas of adjustment common to all who were interviewed, and felt strongly by all. These three areas were drawn from the non directed phase and carried a strong sense of perception amongst those interviewed as being the areas of readjustment for them. Certainly the three areas were universal to all interviewed and although there was overlap with the categories used in phase two of the interviews, it was apparent that such universality made these three the major adjustments graduates face. Therefore, the three categories of: work environment; world view change; and lifestyle expectations are the three major areas focused on in this study.

Several non-universal indications were found in this study. In phase II of the interviews a check was made of a category list of indications of potential re-entry problems compiled from a literature search. This enabled some comparison with other studies. Additionally several other non-universal indications were found that are significant in preparing graduates for re-entry and in helping them in the process of re-entry.

The findings of this study differ from the findings of other studies due to method used. The prime method used in this study was non-directed face to face interviews in contrast to the few, but major studies, which used surveys and sought answers to directed questions. The method of this study allowed the findings to be described as the perceptions of the graduates involved and the universality of the three major areas across the interviews allowed for the conclusion that these are the areas of adjustment, that graduates returning from New Zealand to their home countries, will encounter.

This study describes in detail the three universal areas of work environment, world view change and lifestyle expectations as detailed by the graduates in their interviews. In the discussion of these, some understanding is sought as to why these three stand out. Culture distancing occurring during the sojourn experience is postulated as one possible reason. This study highlights areas for further research: The world view change that occurs in students while studying overseas; The effect on re-entry of the country chosen to study in; and what assists graduates in the re-entry process.

PREFACE

In 1966 I entered Victoria University to study chemistry. Moving to the city after growing up in the country brought many changes and new experiences into my life. Meeting and getting to know some international students were amongst those experiences. My life journey took me on to a career in high school teaching and, as a result of interests begun when I was a student, I moved on into Christian work and chaplaincy amongst students. My interest in international students continued to develop as a result.

One thing that fascinated me was the effect of coming to a new country and culture had on internationals. I became conscious of the influence university teaching and varieties of lifestyles had on internationals and through letters and some short visits I became conscious of re-entry as an issue of adjustment for many who returned home.

My role in Christian work amongst students changed to one of coordinating and facilitating work amongst internationals nationally. As part of my job I was advising and encouraging others from the New Zealand church community in providing for international students who were in their parishes and communities. One of the areas I was frequently asked about concerned the welfare of graduates going through re-entry. It became obvious to me from stories, personal experience and looking for information that there was very little information available in New Zealand to help any one prepare a student for re-entry. My job allowed opportunity for me to research and develop material to assist with any major issues encountered in ministry. As a result I began to look into re-entry The more I found out about it the more I realised very little was known. I perceived there was an opportunity to do some worthwhile research that could be of benefit to other practitioners in the area of international student welfare.

Coincident with this growing interest in re-entry was the opportunity for a short sabbatical in South east Asia. I resolved to make a major part of the research component of this sabbatical the issue of re-entry. The decision to present the research in an academic medium came out of the idea that it would have a good opportunity to be received and used by university and polytechnic staff. There would hopefully be a flow on into programmes for returning graduates. It is my hope that information contained in this thesis will be used to benefit future generations of returning graduates.

Terry McGrath February 1998

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