Imagination and Aspiration: Flames of possibility for migrant background high school students and their parents

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Abstract: This paper aims to show how imagination is an important tool in the formation of aspiration and ethnic capital for young high school students and their parents in the city of Blacktown, New South Wales, Australia. Through semi-structured focus group interviews with parents, teachers and students, data from the demographic space of the school revealed that despite the limitations in economic capital there was social and cultural capital in migrant families, which provided reinforcement for the realisation of various goals, especially through education and "hard work". The students from migrant backgrounds had an opportunity to aspire and imagine a grand future because they were able to inhabit and negotiate the field of education more easily with the strong support from the family. So ethnicity and cultural background affected not only educational and vocational aspirations but also impacted on the imagination of the parents and students.

Introduction

This article offers an explanation for the high number of girls from migrant backgrounds aspiring for higher education at a partially selective single sex girls' school because they are able to successfully navigate the cultural map in which aspirations are situated. Despite the fact that the school is located in a low socio-economic area, our qualitative research shows evidence of shared norms and values in the families of the girls that allow them to aspire to post school options. Bourdieu's (1997; 1977) work for this paper is important because he places emphasis on the importance of familial norms and transmission of cultural capital in the reproduction of socio-economic advantages and disadvantages. The examples from our research also show 'ethnic capital' at work in the form of an imagined changed future. I start by outlining the background for the study. I then go on to provide some key perspectives and debates in the literature on aspirations. Next I discuss the context, research methodology and approach to the study. With the methodology, I look at the collaborative ethnographic approach and the importance of using digital montage and creative writing and consider the links between them. For the theoretical framework, I suggest that we use Appadurai's (2004) theory on the capacity to aspire to make sense of the aspirations of migrants generally and imagination particularly to consider how these are situated in the thick of social life. Finally, I highlight that the emphasis Appadurai (2004) puts on the capacity to aspire within a specific social and cultural context enforces norms and values that lead to high educational aspirations and imaginings of a positive educational future.

Background to the Study

The *Student Aspiration Trajectory Research* (STAR) project is a partnership between schools in the Blacktown Learning Community (BLC), New South Wales, Australia and the Centre for Educational Research, University of Western Sydney, New South Wales, Australia (Somerville, Gray, Reid, Naidoo, Gannon, & Brown, 2013).The Blacktown Learning Community started in 1995 as a professional learning and capacity building alliance of primary and high schools in the Blacktown area. The Centre for Educational Research at the University of Western Sydney focuses on educational curriculum issues and pedagogies research around core themes of sustainability, equity and globalisation. The project was funded by the *Higher Education Participation Program* (HEPP), a scheme initiated by the Australian Commonwealth in 2010 after the 2008 Australian *Review of Higher Education* by Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales. The Bradley review called for an increase in the participation rates of under-represented groups and recommended an overall increase in enrolment by 2020. This was based on the fact that from 1989 to 2007, there was only 1% increase in tertiary participation of students from the lowest 25% of social-economic status (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 28).

Literature Review

In considering barriers and enablers to further education in Australia, Sellar (2013) investigated equity, markets and the politics of aspiration in Australian higher education. His paper discusses policy agendas to raise aspirations for university study from students of low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds. Sellar (2013) focuses on aspiration from the working class 'poverty of desire' thesis that underpins current initiatives to increase educational aspiration amongst working class families, which is yet another strategy in the neoliberal marketization of education to aspirations of low SES groups that are manifest in the current aspiration-raising agenda in Australian higher education (2013, p. 245). He further identifies (2013, p. 245) a tension in aspiration between (1) human capital promises of economic rewards for enterprising behaviour and (2) the policing of aspirations and behaviours according to dominant social values.

High student and parental aspirations, as shown in my study, do not in isolation necessarily guarantee the realisation of student academic achievement or aspirations. Gale and Tranter (2011) found that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are being enrolled at university to improve the nation's economic aspirations and in keeping with the principles of social justice. Higher education policy, they believe has to go beyond economics and "must recognise the interests of the least advantaged by developing a deeper understanding of the knowledges, values and understandings of those who are under-represented and excluded from higher education, especially people from lower socio-economic backgrounds" (Gale and Tranter 2011, p.30). This view is also similarly expressed by Naidoo, Wilkinson, Langat, Adoniou, Cunneen & Bolger (2015) in their research that focused on supporting pathways for refugee students' access and participation in tertiary education when they say that the "prior life experiences of refugee background students should be viewed as assets with possibilities for the academic and social culture of universities rather than problems to be solved" (p.13). Whereas expanding the system has created new opportunities for low SES students, "the evidence to date is that this has not led to greater representation in university of people from disadvantaged groups" (Gale & Tranter 2011, p 42).

Meanwhile Kenway and Hickey-Moody's (2011) research on life chances, lifestyle and everyday aspirational strategies draws on an ethnographic study of young men in schools

in regional Australia and shows how their everyday knowledges inform their aspirations. According to Kenway and Hickey-Moody (2011, p. 151), the Australian Government report, the Bradley Review, articulated that socioeconomic status and rural location are two significant factors influencing students' aspirations to attend university. The report showed that there are significant differences between the university aspirations of high and low SES school students, and between rural and urban students; although the relationships between these contexts have not been explained. While participation in tertiary education in Australia is not necessarily defined by gender and regional locality, Kenway and Hickey-Moody (2011, p. 152) found that student experiences are rooted in social, cultural and spatial inequalities. Moreover, thematic insights to gender performativity point to the diverse and complex aspirational strategies and tactics that boys adopt (Kenway & Hickey-Moody 2011, p. 161). When it comes to the boys' life chances, the researchers found that the school curriculum generally favours aspirations for boys giving them the *means to aspire* to university study (Kenway & Hickey-Moody 2011, p. 161). Additionally, the social class of the family is an important predictor of educational life chances since it is in the life of the family that the boys receive knowledge that enables them to transition to university. In working class families however while the boys are eager to enhance their life chances, their social class knowledge and strategies for transitioning to higher education are out of sync with the school's grids of prestige, knowledge and power (Kenway & Hickey-Moody 2011, p. 161).

In a U.K. study, Shah et al (2010, pp. 1109-1127) investigated the educational achievement and career aspirations among young British Pakistanis in regard to 'mobilizing ethnic capital'. The article outlines and seeks to explain recent trends that show that higher numbers of young British Pakistani men and women are enrolling in higher education compared to their white peers. Shah et al.'s (2010) qualitative research asserts that 'ethnic capital' housed in British Pakistani families and which provides evidence for parents and families socializing their children sharing norms and values of white British families and this has resulted in the British Pakistani children wanting to pursue a university education. They argue, however, that the relationship between education and ethnicity has not been adequately researched, especially the role of 'ethnic capital' in improving social class disadvantage. Moreover, Shah et al.'s (2010) research also identifies the limitations of 'ethnic capital' particularly the intersections with gender and religion that produces differences between, and within, working-class British Pakistani families. They do not however attribute educational success solely to the acquisition of ethnic capital but show also how structural constraints, selective school systems and racialised labour markets, influence the effectiveness of 'ethnic capital' in promoting educational achievement and social mobility Shah et al. (2010, p. 1110).

In a supporting USA study, Vallejo (2009, p. 129) reviewed 'Latina Spaces' like the role of the Latino community and professional associations in facilitating social mobility for Latino people. The study, which took place over three years and consisted of participant observation, semi-structured and structured in-depth interviews found that like Shah.et al.'s study of British Pakistani migrants, Latinas mobilized "ethnic capital" to create professional associations in their communities. The professional associations provide valuable economic, social and cultural capital to co-ethnics. Latino members of the organization realize that while they must share the same norms and business ethics of white middle-class business culture to succeed, they feel that it is important to retain their ethnic identity and provide resources to the ethnic community (Vallejo 2009, p. 129). These spaces, the professional organisations and the Latino community maintain middle class minority identity. While the Latino ethnic

communities lack the "high-quality resources" that might shield them against downward assimilation and advance social mobility, the findings suggest that it takes one or two extra generations for Latinos to mobilize class and ethnic resources to promote mobility (Vallejo, 2009, p. 129).

Raleigh and Kao (2010, p. 1083) in their study are concerned to establish whether immigrant minority parents have more consistent college aspirations for their children. They examined the aspirations that immigrant parents had for their children compared to those of American native-born parents. Using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K), they documented differences in the construction and preservation of white, black, Hispanic, and Asian parents' college aspirations for their children between kindergarten, third, and fifth grades. Raleigh and Kao (2010, p. 1083) found that immigrant parents are more optimistic about their children's educational life trajectories than are native-born parents and are therefore more likely to maintain unswervingly high aspirations for their children. The parents' were able to see their college aspirations for their children come to fruition because it served as a form of social capital. However, not all immigrant parents could be optimistic because their pre and post migration experiences created hardships which were at times difficult to overcome. Nevertheless immigrant parents consistently reinforced messages about college plans throughout childhood.

The literature review shows that there is a significant gap in research in Australia that explores the influence of the migration experience on aspirations and the interplay between and with perceived enablers and barriers to post school education. This research study is therefore important as it refers to the extent to which the experience of the parents' migration becomes a significant contextual factor which second generation children draw upon when talking about their aspirations and educational trajectories.

Theoretical Framework

In this paper, I seek to discuss aspiration as a strong feature of the imagination and cultural capacity particularly in migrant communities. According to Appadurai (2004), aspirations have something to do with economics because wants, preferences, choices, and calculations are factors that have been assigned to the discipline of economics, and as such they have been largely invisible in the study of culture. I intend to show that it is a function of education and schools in particular therefore to develop a set of tools for students to navigate and identify the cultural map of aspirations. This requires placing specific resources like navigational maps in the aspirational situations for the disadvantaged students who are most in need of them, for example, in low SES schools. Aspiration is perhaps best described as 'the capacity to imagine futures' (Sellar & Gale, 2011, p. 122). Young people's capacity to imagine the future is dependent upon a range of interconnecting factors such as schooling experiences; school attainment level; peers' choices; knowledge and awareness of post - school educational options as well as knowledge and availability of post school advice, support and assistance; parental, family and community views regarding education and career; and the intricate assemblage of conditions and circumstances that make up socioeconomic status (Regional Policy Advisory Committee 2013).

Appadurai (2004, pp. 66-67) further argues that while 'the poor are frequently in a position where they are encouraged to subscribe to norms whose social effect is to further diminish their dignity, exacerbate their inequality and deepen their lack of access to material goods and services', so, too, he suggests, aspirations always emerge within the thick of social life. The capacity to aspire then while being generated within social spaces like schools also seeks to provide a new approach to the question: why does culture matter? (Appadurai, 2004,

p. 59) He contends that it is in culture that notions of the future, as much as of those about the past, are entrenched and cultivated. Thus, in strengthening the capacity to aspire, considered as a cultural capacity, especially among the poor, the future-trajectory of development could find a natural ally, and the poor could find the resources required to challenge and change the conditions of their own poverty (Appadurai, 2004, p. 59).

This raises two important questions for education and policymakers: why is culture a capacity (worth building and strengthening), and what are the concrete ways in which inter-culturality can be strengthened (Appadurai, 2004, p.59)? The idea of aspiration as a cultural capacity can build on Taylor's path-breaking concept of "recognition" (Taylor cited in Appadurai, 2004, p. 62). In this work, Taylor referred to a "politics of recognition," where members of disadvantaged groups who have been denied recognition for their culture or way of life, now have their cultural identities, their religion, their race, their gender and ethnicity recognised in the political domain. Their voices are now being heard (Taylor, 1992, p. 26). The concept of recognition is particularly important for school and university curricula because the worldviews of persons different from our own are able to be shared. This concept is also important for education overall because it makes intercultural understanding and intercultural sensitivity an obligation, and recognizes the sovereign value of human self-worth in cross-cultural transactions apart from issues of redistribution (Appadurai, 2004, p. 62).

Additionally, for migrant parents, the imagination becomes a source of aspiration especially in situations where they may be at a disadvantage. As the migrant parent's narrative in the next section demonstrates, his imagination gave him "voice" allowing him to desire a particular type of school curriculum and education system. The capacity of the disadvantaged to exercise "voice" is one way in which the disadvantaged might find plausible ways to alter what Appadurai (2004, pp. 66-67) calls the terms of recognition in any particular cultural regime. Appadurai (2004, pp. 66-67) treats voice as a cultural capacity, not just as a generalized and universal democratic virtue, because for voice to take effect, it must engage social, political, and economic issues in terms of ideologies, doctrines, and norms which are widely shared and credible, even by the rich and powerful.

The capacity to aspire carries an implicit ambivalence too (Appadurai, 2004, p. 69). Migrants leave their homelands for much wider horizons and, at the same time, confront forces of marginalisation within the same framework that allows such dreams and imaginings in the first place. Aspiring to higher education becomes the stepping-stone to economic and material advantage and facilitates change. Further, migrant families express possibilities in choices made, often in terms of social status and for economic and material gain, like desiring that their children become doctors, "but these are inevitably tied up with more general norms, presumptions, and axioms about the good life, and life more generally"(Appadurai, 2004, p. 69.

Context

Blacktown is located within the Greater Western Sydney (GWS) area. GWS is Australia's fastest growing region and third largest economy. Over the next 15 years 600,000 people are expected to settle in GWS bringing the region's total population to 5.5 million (Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils [WSROC], 2011). GWS is a socio-economically disadvantaged area that historically suffers from systemic underinvestment in social infrastructure, particularly in regards to quality educational and cultural facilities. It has a high culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) population and has been the locality for significant refugee resettlement with almost two thirds of Australia's newly arrived refugee

and humanitarian entrants settling in the region. The CALD population within GWS has been identified as a specific population group that face significant and ongoing socio-economic inequities, such as low income, low educational attainment and high unemployment (WRSOC, 2011).

Western Girls High School is an inclusive school in Western Sydney with both academically selective students and local, comprehensive students. Most government secondary schools in Australia are comprehensive which means that they enrol all students who live in the surrounding areas. Selective schools test applicants' academic ability and enrol only the top performers. Some schools like Western Girls are partially selective and have a mixture of selective and non-selective entry. Western Girls has approximately 720 students, with 2% Aboriginal and 47% from non-English speaking backgrounds. As one of only two government girls' schools in Western Sydney, the school exemplifies the current research and practices in Girls' Education strategies and presents an energetic culture of achievement, opportunity and success. The enrichment programs extend students in areas such as creative and performing arts, public speaking and problem solving as well as sport. A range of transition programs help support students, especially those of refugee and Aboriginal background, to transition to further education. 97% of students in 2011 satisfactorily completed the New South Wales Higher School Certificate (senior school level Years 11 and 12 or equivalent).

Methodology

Against the background of place discussed above, the project employed a collaborative ethnography research approach. The overall guiding research questions for the project focussed on the aspiration trajectories of children in the Blacktown Learning Community; enablers and barriers to their participation in further education and factors that can facilitate the development and support for aspirations to participate in further education. It was decided that each school would negotiate the classes who would be invited to participate, the teachers who would become co-researchers in the project, and the creation of artefacts to represent their imagined futures. Visual forms of representation have been under-valued, under-researched and under-represented (Anning, 2003). As a result this study is unique in that it reports on findings from visual research methods and, more importantly, how to interpret the visual. It was agreed that data collection should be non-intrusive and integrated into everyday classroom practice. In my particular school, the teacher as co-researcher decided that fifty Visual Arts students from years 9 and 10 would participate in a day of creative activities. We believed that the visual task may be very helpful for elicitation purposes as it will allow students to go beyond the verbal mode of thinking. A creative task would also encourage thinking in non-standard ways. In this way, the arts-based method of graphic elicitation which I have adopted may overcome silences that may exist among participants.

Collaborative ethnography is where the participants, in this case, school students and their teacher engage in digital-mediated communication as part of their everyday classroom talk. While technology and information infrastructure might impact the learning situation, it can also be used as a resource in ethnographic research. Video ethnography and video reflexivity were used in the classroom setting. The aim was to encourage the active participation of the high school girls in a collaborative and iterative process of filming and reviewing of scriptless video by the researcher (Kindon, 2003, p. 143). Simultaneously, through digital artefacts, the study explored the girls' aspirations and educational trajectories and identification within and beyond the classroom. Thus, the study explored in what ways

the girls possessed a capacity to aspire, while also potentially transforming the classroom creative arts lesson into a practice of agency. Thus, by grounding this imaginary in collaborative ethnography, it made possible a journey into the aspirations and educational trajectories of female students in a creative arts lesson. Further collaboration was noted between me as the researcher and the student participants in that we all had a shared history in terms of our identity and trajectory as migrants. That shared endeavour constituted in important ways an understanding of the girls' repertoires of cultural practices and of the value of ethnic capital.

Video ethnography while making evident the cultural flow and disjunctures, also indirectly addressed questions of enablers and barriers to further education. Students were divided into groups and were asked to visit a variety of work stations where they were required to answer questions about what they aspired to be when they left school. Each student completed a creative writing activity, made a digital montage, and conducted and participated in interviews with each other before editing the videos of the interviews. The students were treated to a morning tea and lunch and enjoyed the day. The intention was that students would think of creative ways to express their future aspirations which is in keeping with collective ethnography research that requires imaginative ways of presenting research accounts. The use of digital montage develops the collaborative potential of ethnographic research and in this study young people document and interpret their own experiences. By being attentive to the different responses to the task, my aim was also to let the participants highlight the important aspirations and educational trajectories from their own experience. There are, however, limits to the extent to which these open methods may be said to be satisfactory. Not all participants favour open methods even though the different modes (spoken, written and visual) made multiple meanings and interpretations for the students and the researcher when they were brought together (Bazerman, 2004). Further, White (2003, p. 65) discusses the significance of the video as a means of facilitating interaction and enabling self-expression. She defines 'video as product' as a much more interactive situation which involves the communication of a message to an audience (2003, p. 66). Additionally, Niesyto believes:

> If somebody in nowadays media society wants to learn something
> about youth's ideas, feelings, and their ways of experiencing the
> world, he or she should give them a chance to express themselves also
> by means of their own self-made media products (2000, p.137).

I was allocated from a team of five researchers to conduct the research at the school because I had a school to university partnership with the school in relation to refugee background students. Despite this partnership, it was decided that the school would negotiate the classes who would participate in the research, the teachers who would become co-researchers on the project, and the artefacts to represent the imagined futures of students. It must also be noted that data collected, while possessing a degree of openness, was solicited for research. The production of the artefacts was contextual to the research questions and arose out of interaction with the researchers.

Semi structured focus groups were conducted to explore the enablers and barriers to participation in higher education with parents and teachers. While the student data revealed aspirations and trajectories, it also indirectly made comments about achieving curriculum and study goals. Data was analysed on the basis of themes in the responses from participants. The teacher focus group consisted of between six to eight non-specialist teachers while the parent focus group consisted of seventeen parents. Questions focused on the career and further education aspirations of the girls at Western Girls High and how they changed over time; factors that would assist these girls to go on to further education and barriers to the girls

going on to further education. Throughout this process I was conscious of my role as an outsider, insider and on the boundary of these two roles. As such there were regular responses from other researchers in the team as a part of the reflexive process, in providing a dialogue around my findings and whether my reflexive analysis has provided an insightful and useful contribution to the study.

Results and Discussion

My research study data shows that students are agents of change, in that the girls at the partially selective girls' school play an active role in negotiating their educational roles and gendered identities in schools and social contexts. Although students experience socioeconomic barriers that affect inclusion, strategies of aspiration, resistance and resilience empower their identities and participation in diverse educational contexts. So the school in my research sample offers an opportunity for transformation and empowerment and influences the effectiveness of ethnic social capital in post school aspirations because 'the capacity to aspire, like any complex cultural capacity, thrives and survives on practice, repetition, exploration, conjecture and refutation' (Appadurai, 2004, p. 69).

The participants in this study illustrate the capacity to aspire firstly in the interview data from parents and students. Data clearly identifies efforts to change the terms of recognition especially in aspiring to higher education. This recognition shares a commitment to revaluing disrespected identities and changing dominant patterns of representation and communication that marginalize certain groups especially in low SES schools (Taylor, 1992). Tertiary study, in particular university, is a goal of students. University represents students' grand visions and career paths. In the following examples, participants detail the importance of university study towards their specific career goals. One student in the video clip says:

> I want to have successfully have completed the HSC and be attending
> university either in Australia or on a student exchange program
> overseas...In ten years I will be 24, so I picture myself finishing
> university or whatever course I am doing, or pursuing my careers.

The student adds that some teenagers do not initially realise the importance of university education, but thereafter realise its value to their careers and potential contributor to being 'rich and famous':

> I think that most teenagers won't think of going to university because
> they don't think it's important but I think that as we finish our studies
> and start thinking about what careers we want to choose that they will
> start to decide to go to university because it will help them later in life,
> they will become as rich and famous as they wanna be.

Secondly, we see the ability of participants to navigate the cultural map in which aspirations are located and an ability to cultivate an explicit understanding of the links between specific wants or goals and more inclusive scenarios (Appadurai, 2004, p. 83). This demonstrates that despite attending a low SES school, these girls' have the capacity to aspire and the capability to access specific pathways to reach their goals. Many of the girls were either born in Australia or migrated to Australia when they were very young. Many also came from middle class families in their homeland and some had parents who were tertiary qualified overseas. Such intersectionality may account for the high aspirations and educational trajectories evident in data. For instance, Zoe considers her life in ten years from now as still "working, or maybe be playing pianos in different concerts for different people"; Belinda figures "out that architecture has something really nice that I like"; Stacey intends to pursue a gap year and draws upon her diverse creative career interests as well as a diverse

skills-set that are required to achieve these goals; Tracey endeavours to be accepted into the UNSW's nursing program and, within the next ten years, she plans to work in the Prince Alfred Hospital; and Joanne sees herself studying medicine to help her become a cosmetic dermatologist. In the analysis the students present themselves as immune to any social constraints wanting to have careers, and being able to overcome adversity through hard work and determination. The girls' resilience may appear as a form of resistance and response to their marginalized experiences which in turn represents concomitant agency to produce change in their life experiences and social realities. Additionally, these examples help us recognize that aspirations connect to what may be regarded as beneficial about culture, including the lifestyle, values, morals, habits, and material life of any community (Appadurai, 2004, p. 83). By bringing the future back in, by looking at aspirations as cultural capacities, Appadurai (2004, p. 84) concludes that we are in a better position to understand how people actually navigate their social spaces and gives us a reason to build the capacity to aspire in those who have the most to lose from its underdevelopment. "I am not saying that the poor cannot wish, want, need, plan, or aspire. But part of poverty is a diminishing of the circumstances in which these practices occur. If the map of aspirations (continuing the navigational metaphor) is seen to consist of a dense combination of nodes and pathways, relative poverty means a smaller number of aspirational nodes and a thinner, weaker sense of the pathways from concrete wants to intermediate contexts to general norms and back again". (Appadurai, 2004, p. 69)

Additionally, Yeoh, Huang and Lan (2005, p. 312) note that transnational families attempt to enhance "social, cultural and symbolic capital" by educating their children. This was very clear in the focus group data from parents and the video data presented by the migrant students at the school in Blacktown. Many students identified by the teacher as being mid-high SES chose future careers because of family. One female student for example wanted to be an optometrist 'due to my parents' and another wanted to be a teacher 'because of my Dad'. Transnational parents were acutely aware of the status university education and professional qualifications would bring. The aspiration to do well educationally and pursue high career options is co-constituted by the high school students and their parents as transnational actors.

In addition to cultural capacity and economic capital, Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1997; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) identifies social and cultural capital as providing parents with an insider view into education and other institutions. The importance of Bourdieu's work for this paper however is the emphasis he places on the importance of familial norms and transmission of cultural capital in the reproduction of socio-economic advantages and disadvantages. "A 2005 Sydney University study of cultural differences in attitudes to achievement found that students with Asian backgrounds attributed success to effort, hard work and persistence. By contrast, students from Western backgrounds said ability was the key factor in contributing to achievement. The premium that Asian families put on schools with the best Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) results has changed the ethnic profile of some high-performing schools and suburbs" (Milburn, 2010). Thus, for those where imagination and ethnicity are a resource, ethnicity as social capital collapses the Bourdieuian distinction between cultural capital, acquired through the family, and social capital as mediated through social networks and highlights the roles that ethnicity can play through 'ethnic capital' (Modood, 2004). Many migrant parents in the interview data revealed that they moved to the area so that their children could have the opportunity to attend the partially selective high school.

By sending their children to the partially selective girl's school, these migrant parents are able to augment their ethnic capital, since attending a partly selective or selective school is indicative too of status and prestige. "Asian parents have a very strong commitment to

upward mobility. It's not just about a cultural belief that if you work hard, you'll do well. Parents are prepared to move into these areas and they're prepared to discipline their children by putting a high priority on school work, which exceeds anything that a typical local Anglo parent might do." Just how far families are prepared to go in their pursuit of high-quality education is most evident in the selective school system (Age, 2010). The parents, of migrant background, demonstrate culturally specific imaginings of a particular type of aspiration and education system that was possibly part of their cultural experience prior to migrating. Parents from migrant backgrounds indicated in the interview data that they attended the focus group interview to express their views about the education system and the school system in particular creating what (Appadurai, 2004, p. 81) describes as "new states of feeling and connection". For instance one parent said:

> I would say that curriculum is below par and it needs to be looked at so that children achieve much more and they get more focused. If this is going to make any impact. What I have done in year 7 - 15 years back - my child has not done in year 10. I think it is below par if I look at international standards….. That's why the children are losing the focus. They spend five hours on computer, but can't spend half an hour to one hour on studies, whether academic or anything else. That's what the problem lies, in my opinion (Parent A).

Parent A in the excerpt had aspirations of high achievement for his children, making comparisons with global knowledge systems. The students therefore carry a heavy burden with expectations from their families. A similar finding was quoted in a national newspaper where teachers said, "Among some of our students there are high levels of anxiety and depression ... We often have to intervene on behalf of the student to negotiate with their family ...when it's the parents' expectation that they work every night on homework to the exclusion of any recreational involvement" (Age, 2010). Parent B in the next quote indicated in the interview that she had taken up university studies to be a role model to her children. This parent mobilized middle class orientations and mobilized a form of cultural capital. Moreover, their family roles and household organization were constructed to accommodate the demands of school and enhancing educational performance (Ball et al., 1995).

> I'm going to university next year for the simple fact that I want to set examples for my children and say to them, you know what? I'm struggling, studying, family and work. I don't want you to do this. So I'm setting example for my children that they have to do it now while they're young (Parent B).

The very fact that Parent B, a Pacific Islander female wants to be a role model to her children, who she refers to as 'daughters' in the transcript, is evidence of the growing independence of migrant women who now value education as a way of transcending traditional gender roles.

Interestingly enough a number of the students in the video data indicated that they saw themselves travelling in the future and living overseas. Three of the students interviewed planned to travel overseas. Two of the mid-high SES students also planned to travel but their travel was combined with an educational pathway (i.e. as a 'year off' before university or within a student exchange program) (Somerville et.al, 2013, p.17). Travel for children of migrant background can be interpreted as a form of symbolic capital and one that would also mobilize social and cultural capital. Travel for Australian born students becomes the marker in the quest for a better life and carries with it social, economic and material benefits. For migrant students, the quest for status through travel becomes very much a part of post-migration imaginations. The parents of these students travelled when they migrated in search of a better life and so the children aspire to travel.

Conclusion

Imaginings about education trajectories and career aspirations among the young women from a low socio-economic school were shaped largely through family, media, and cultural norms. However, they differed in the routes that they would follow to fulfil these expectations. Some young women saw themselves at university because they felt parental pressure, but most of them saw university as a means to a professional qualification and as a means to making /earning more money. Professional careers were linked with travel, prestige and enhanced social status. So despite the location of the school in a low socio-economic area, parents and students alike saw the fact that the school was partially selective as a way to activate their 'ethnic capital' and enforce norms and values in their children that lead to high educational aspirations and imaginings of a positive educational future. It is clear then how a small research project of this nature can mobilize, expand and enrich the capacity to aspire and imagine within a specific social and cultural context (Appadurai, 2004, p. 70). There is no shortcut to empowerment. It has to take some local cultural form to have resonance, mobilize adherents, and capture the public space of debate (Appadurai, 2004, p. 67).

Currently in Australia, higher education is required to provide pathways for students who traditionally have not seen higher education as contributing to their imagined and desired futures. The underrepresentation of low SES students in higher education has been falsely linked to a lack of motivation and aspiration. This study shows that the girls are resilient, highly motivated with great expectations and aspirations for post school options. They are able to successfully break the social mould through strong personal motivation and with strong school and family support structures are encouraged to transition into further education. It was evident from the overall data that students are able to reflect on their aspirations and education trajectories because they were engaged in their visual arts lesson, they were challenged and the task was relevant to their lives. It is clear therefore that a supportive environment at home and at school is important for the development of aspirations and career skills for positive educational outcomes.

Pre-service teachers, in-service teachers and teacher educators need to ensure therefore that the cultural dimensions of migrant students' life experiences are understood in order to maximise aspirations and successful transitions. Engaging pre-service teachers and teacher educators in a broad examination of 'social justice', examining strategies and pedagogies that work for teaching marginalized and disadvantaged students in particular and exploring what works in addressing social and educational problems is pivotal. The "funds of knowledge" that students bring with them especially migrant students should be acknowledged, nurtured and utilised in the classroom setting. An understanding of the distinct and varied life experiences of these students is essential for developing an understanding of the barriers and challenges that low SES students of migrant background face in school classrooms. Teacher educators need to: have affirming views of students from diverse low SES backgrounds, seeing resources for learning in all students rather than viewing differences as problems to be overcome; see themselves as both responsible for and capable of bringing about educational change that will make schools more responsive to all students; understand how learners construct knowledge and see themselves as capable of promoting learners' knowledge construction; know more about the lives of their students; and use the knowledge about students' lives to design instruction that builds on what they already know while stretching them beyond the familiar (Villegas & Lucas 2002, 21). It means that the 'one size fits all' approach to teaching is not in the best interests of disadvantaged students like newly arrived migrant students

Learning to 'play the 'game' (Bourdieu, 1977) in the school context for these students requires mastering specialized knowledge for academic success. This means that many low SES students of migrant background will not develop the necessary pedagogical, curriculum, assessment and cultural skills to maximise their learning and eventually their transition in school contexts. Ongoing professional development is therefore required for pre-service teachers, in-service teachers and teacher educators particularly in intercultural communication and best practice strategies for working with students from low SES backgrounds. This would require a move away from traditional cultural deficit thinking prevalent in our schools to an approach that recognises that low SES students, especially migrant students are capable, resilient and resourceful. Such an approach to teaching will reduce the insularity of classrooms and can be a catalyst for achieving important curricular and aspirational goals. Consequently, there is a strong imperative for pre-service teachers, in service teachers and teacher educators to become valuable resources, improving support and student engagement in the classroom, enabling rather than disabling the aspirational pathways of students from low SES backgrounds. Teacher professional development programs should foster therefore core skills required by all educators to successfully transition school students particularly in low SES schools. These may include social and academic skills, but more important however, is the commitment to principles of diversity, social justice and equity so that all students achieve outcomes that are meaningful and beneficial.

The development of the inter-relationship between theory and praxis in the teacher education curriculum means that pre-service teachers developed an awareness of the importance of combining academic learning with issues relating to education in the community and became active agents in their own professional development. Academic learning becomes more real and builds a sense of citizenship in pre-service teachers. The link between theory and praxis allows pre-service teachers to gain an understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of social justice issues, and an enhanced sense of civic and social responsibility. The active construction of knowledge leads to a deeper understanding of the course objectives which are designed to introduce pre-service teachers to the roots of social differences and social inequalities and to motivate and inspire engagement through critical pedagogy. Pre-service teachers hence develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to empower themselves as future teachers to be able to develop social justice projects in their future schools.

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Acknowledgements