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Encountering education in the rural: migrant women’s perspectives.

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Encountering education in the rural: migrant women’s perspectives.

This paper explores migrant women’s encounters with formal and informal education in what can be termed new immigration rural destinations. We ask to what extent educational opportunities are realized in these new destinations. We show that education aspirations may be jeopardized because of the desire to achieve economic goals and thus require remedial action. Specifically, we refer to qualitative data collected in rural (and remote) Boddington in Western Australia, and rural Armagh in Northern Ireland. The paper engages with two interrelated dimensions of this migrant/migration experience. English is not a first language for our participants and we first examine the provision and consumption of informal English Language classes. In doing so, we demonstrate the complex social and cultural dimensions of community-based English language instruction. Second, we attend to migrant mothers’ perceptions of and responses to children’s formal education. We highlight transnational senses of, and tensions around, ‘local/rural’ pedagogies and resultant migrant strategies.

Key words: English as Second Language, informal education, migrant women, new immigration destinations, rural education

Word count: 6962
Introduction

There is a rich, emerging body of literature on the ways in which middle-class education agendas drive transnational migration, including for example the substantial and diverse work on tertiary student migration (e.g., Collins, 2008; Findlay, King, Smith, Geddes and Skilton, 2011; Raghuram, 2012; Pásztor 2015). At the same time, a significant body of work has investigated the importance of labour migration for remote and rural regions (e.g., Findlay, McCollum, Shubin, Apsite and Krisjane, 2013; McAreeavey 2017; Mayes and Koshy, in press). While both strands of research seek to situate these migrations within broader multi-scalar processes, there is as yet very little work on intersections between labour and education migration, and even less so in relation to gender and ‘the rural.’ Further, just as the cultural dimensions of rurality are underexplored in relation to education, so too are the interconnections between migrant education and encounters with rural places. This paper contributes to understandings of the links between labour migration and family education agendas by exploring migrant women’s individual and family aspirations for, and experiences of, education in the rural places in which they find themselves as a result of the pursuit of transnational employment opportunities. Specifically, we engage with experiences and discourses of formal and informal education from the perspectives of migrant women for whom English is not their first language. This empirical data encompasses the New Immigration Destinations (NIDs) of Boddington in Western Australia and County Armagh in Northern Ireland, UK. Two dimensions of this experience are highlighted: first, the provision and consumption of English as Second Language (ESL) instruction, and second, migrant mothers’ encounters with children’s formal primary school education and consequent responses.
As Schmalzbauer (2009) points out, the current emphasis on urban destinations in transnational migration scholarship makes assumptions about the general characteristics of migrant destinations including the presence of a labour market along with substantial migrant networks, a diverse if not ‘cosmopolitan’ population, and a developed transport infrastructure. In contrast, the scope of support networks is much more limited in rural NIDs (Finney et al. 2013): they tend to be less dense or well-established due to a lack of critical mass and because of the newness of the population. This is increasingly problematic given the growing numbers of labour migrants moving to new rural destinations across the globe (see for example Fonesca 2008; Friberg 2013; Corrado 2014; Weidinger and Kordel, 2016). In addition to addressing the relative lack of attention to the experiences of migrant women in rural locations, this article makes a contribution to the as yet nascent research on migrant mothers living with their children. As Gilmartin and Migge (2016) note, studies of ‘maternal migration’ have tended to focus on women separated from their children (see, for example, the substantial literature on global care chains), while studies that address family migration, or migration as a family undertaking (see Cooke, 2008), have tended to privilege male breadwinners and the experiences of children. Important exceptions to this, is the work of Waters (2006) and Huang and Yeoh (2005), as described below.

The paper commences with a brief discussion of the macro-politics of English language teaching and learning as relevant to our research sites, followed by a short overview of the conceptualization of visible/invisible pedagogies informing our analysis of migrant perceptions of formal education. We then offer an overview of the empirical data including a discussion of our sites as NIDs. Following this we illustrate the connections between local provision of informal ESL classes and migrant women’s experiences and senses of belonging in Boddington and Armagh. Next, we explore migrant women’s perceptions of and resultant
strategies around formal children’s education, primarily with reference to migrant experiences in Boddington. We demonstrate links between the rural as a particular kind of place and not only perceptions of ‘quality’ of education but also specific pedagogies, and show how migrants seek specific opportunities as afforded by their situational capacities.

**English Language Instruction and Competence**

English language teaching and learning is a central dimension of migrant experiences and, as Pennycook and Coutand-Marin (2003, p.338) remind us, it ‘is a highly political project.’ Migrant English language competence and education is deeply political for example in its purported relationships with positive economic and social outcomes for both migrants and the nation-state, let alone its connections to national identity. This reflects wider global approaches to migrant integration (OECD, 2015; CEC, 2016) in play in our study areas. For instance, increasingly in the UK emphasis is placed on the importance of learning the host society’s language as a tool for positive integration (Markova and Black, 2007; Department for Communities and Local Government, 2009; CEC, 2016). Meanwhile in Australia there is a long history in migration policy of strongly connecting migrant English language competence with ‘integration’ and ‘social cohesion’ (Hoang and Hamid, 2016). The related imposition of language tests and minimum scores as entry requirements/barriers in Australia, as Hoang and Hamid (2016) demonstrate, is most recently applied to prospective labour migrants in order not only to promote social cohesion, however, but also to manage national security threats, keep processing costs and times to a minimum, and limit numbers in response to shifting national and global economic conditions. Less remarked upon are the

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1 We note that Pennycook and Coutand-Marin (2003) make this comment in the context of their examination of the teaching of English as a missionary project; however the broader reach of this statement is clear in the paper’s acknowledgement that all pedagogy implies a politics.
‘everyday’ material and localized politics of both formal and informal English language teaching and learning entangled in these macro-scale dimensions, as we explore in our analysis.

Further, these policies clearly point to the importance of English language as an integrating tool. How English language competency might lead to integration, however, remains opaque. Indeed, research emphasises the importance of cultural knowledge in allowing individuals to interact in the workplace and education settings, among others. Within the health sector, for instance, the need for cultural mediation has been noted (Martin and Phelan, 2010) to allow migrants to understand social norms within a new society. At the same time, migrant perceptions and evaluations of host destinations, including, as we show, understandings of the pedagogies underpinning formal education, are shaped by their (often continuing) social and economic linkages with their countries of origin (see for example Vertovec, 1999). As Hall (1993, p.262) has noted, migrants often ‘negotiate and translate’ between two cultural languages and identities. We seek to understand our participants’ complex encounters with formal education in light of these translations and also, following Sriprakash, Proctor and Hu (2016) whose work we draw on in some detail, in the context of two contrasting pedagogic modes which we now describe.

**Visible and invisible pedagogies**

In the Australian context, Sriprakash et al. (2016) explore middle-class, Chinese-background parents’ use of private tutoring for their children attending primary school in Sydney. They show how participants were satisfied with the schooling, but were at the same time worried, in particular, about the lack of homework. Sriprakash et al. (2016) draw, in part, on Bernstein’s theorization of invisible and visible pedagogies to interpret these parents’
concerns and resultant use of private tutoring. Following Bernstein, Sriprakash et al. (2016, p.428) define invisible pedagogies as those in which ‘learning is a tacit, invisible act’ whereas visible pedagogies ‘emphasise strong framing, or explicit controls, over the relay of knowledge’. Invisible pedagogies often foreground ‘modes of instruction in which the selection, sequencing, pacing and evaluation of knowledge are made implicit’ and make use of a variety of assessment modes and pliable evaluation criteria, and promote democratic classroom social relations (Sriprakash et al. 2016, p.428). In other words, the style of learning is less obviously structured. On the other hand, visible pedagogies maintain ‘strong boundaries between subject areas, single modes of assessment,’ rigid evaluation criteria and hierarchical teacher-student relations (Sriprakash et al. 2016, p.429). According to Sriprakash et al. (2016, p.429), primary schooling in Australia tends toward an approach in which ‘ideals of invisible pedagogic modes are embedded into visible structuring practices, namely the explicit and strongly framed evaluation of student performance.’ They argue that this creates a tension expressed in questions around the capacities of invisible pedagogy to give students an understanding of/skills in the sorts of evaluations that enable access to selective public secondary schools and prestigious universities.

Introducing Boddington and Armagh

It is not our intention to offer a comparative analysis but rather to use data from Boddington and County Armagh to illustrate the interconnections between the provision of formal and informal education in rural places, gender and the migrant experience of rural places/rurality. Reference to both sites enables a richer transnational understanding of migrant women’s diverse encounters with informal and formal education in rural places. In
both sites the research had its origin in work separately commissioned to document migrant access to support and services in the broader regions in which these rural NIDs are located.  

Boddington is a very small, remote rural community in the south-west of Western Australia which has recently experienced the arrival of a relatively substantial but largely transitory number of transnational migrants as a result of the re-opening and expansion of a nearby gold mine (see Mayes and Koshy, in press, for details). The recruitment of transnational labour at the mine increased the percentage of non-English-speaking migrant households from less than 1% of the local population to close to 6%. This article draws on semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted in 2011 and 2013 with 10 women who had migrated from a number of different countries to rural Boddington in order to accompany male spouses who had accepted skilled employment at the gold mine. These interviewees had been in Boddington for up to three years, the majority had young children at the time, and their English language skills spanned ‘basic’ to well-developed. These migrant wives entered the country as ‘secondary’ migrants, that is, as dependents of male partners; as such they were not subject to English language testing but at the same time were not entitled to state-provided English lessons (Migration Council, nd).

County Armagh in Northern Ireland is best understood as part of a region in which many areas are intrinsically rural, and the connections between the small urban centres and the rural areas are manifold. Following the expansion of Europe in 2004, Northern Ireland became a primary destination for Eastern European migrants, in particular from Poland, who

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2 In the case of Boddington, part of this research was commissioned by the Peel Community Development Group to better understand the provision of community services in the Peel Region; in the case of Armagh the empirical data was part of a project conducted for the Nuffield Foundation’ Small Grant Scheme REF SGS/34428 and for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Ref: 1103001PFA01 and 1103001A) on migrants’ everyday experiences.
moved to both urban and rural locations with significant numbers arriving in the Armagh region (NISRA, 2010). The qualitative data drawn on in this article was collected over the course of a series of research projects in 2009 and in 2013 in two rural areas in Country Armagh. It uses data from an interview conducted in 2013 with a Polish teacher to the region and one of three focus groups convened a Polish women’s group on 1st December 2009. Those groups were attended by a core group of approximately eight women at each all of whom had relocated to Armagh in the last 1 to 5 years. These women met at a local centre for women that offered a range of training and support services, all accompanied with childcare. The focus groups were conducted in Polish and were co-facilitated by the author and two qualified psychologists, both of whom were interpreters. When they first arrived in Armagh, these participants had in some cases no familiarity with the English language while others had what they described as ‘basic’ English.

Class, mobility and educational opportunities

The women interviewed in Armagh had moved there ‘by sheer chance’ as one participant put it. They had come to Armagh for reasons connected to their partners’ or their own employment: the women had followed husbands who had secured unskilled work in Armagh either through an agency or network of friends, or had taken up employment they had found for themselves. In each case, employment was the motivation, and the work secured ‘just happened’ to be in Armagh. ‘Sheer chance’ could also characterise the arrival of interviewed migrants in Boddington: in this case too, the drawcard was the availability of work in the gold mine (and opportunities for career advancement on the part of husbands) as opposed to Boddington itself. The women migrated as ‘trailing wives’ whose primary reason for joining their partners, as consistently expressed in the interviews, was the desire to stay physically together as a family in the one place. The alternative was for husbands to
work in Boddington on a fly-in-fly-out roster arrangement—this involves a set number of days working and staying in mine-camp accommodation, followed most commonly by a shorter, and sometimes equal, number of days at home, and so on. This would mean periodic spatial separation of the family.

Even though at an individual level many of these women seemed to arrive in both Armagh and Boddington through happenstance, these flows were less about chance and more about wider transnational circuits of labour. Recruitment in Boddington was sponsored by a large transnational mining company and in Armagh, in the early days at least, it was largely driven by recruitment agencies who travelled to Polish cities to find new employees. This reflects a pattern found elsewhere (Findlay et al. 2013). A key difference between the two sites is that the partners of the women migrants had relocated to Boddington in order to take up skilled and highly-paid employment, whereas in Armagh migrants came to fill semi-skilled and low wage positions. The women who had migrated to Boddington found themselves confronted with a virtually non-existent labour market, whereas Armagh offered a stronger labour market for migrant women. Another difference is that over time as networks became established, increasingly migrants came to Armagh following recommendations from family and friends, and relied less on recruitment agencies. In both research sites the women and their families were categorized as migrants.

While employment was the primary driver of these transnational migrations, educational opportunities and desires for themselves and their children were also of importance to our participants in both sites. These potential collateral opportunities and benefits, however, were broadly conceived rather than specific to Boddington or Armagh. For
example, interviewed migrant women in Boddington expressed a belief that, as Sofia put it, the move would be ‘good for the education about the English’ and that there was the opportunity ‘to get a better education.’ In the perception of Armagh focus group members, Ireland ‘not only creates job opportunities but also delivers educational [opportunities] for our children and facilitates our own development’ (Focus group interviewee #4). Scholarship on transnational migration primarily in pursuit of children’s educational advantage, including acquisition of advanced English language skills, has shown it to be a deeply-classed and exclusionary project (Huang and Yeoh, 2005; Waters, 2006). The educational aspirations articulated in Boddington and Armagh, however, suggest that the desire for and access to transnational educational opportunities can cut across class when linked to labour migration (as the primary driver).

**The instrumental value of learning English as a second language.**

As noted above, English language competencies and education are an important dimension of the experience (and presence) of migrants in countries where English is the national language. In the case of Armagh, acquiring English language skills was, and remains, an important consideration in migrants’ decision to move to the region (NISRA, 2015), as also reflected in the focus group data. Not surprisingly, given the desires of our participants for gaining and/or improving English language skills and cultural capital, English as Second Language (ESL) classes were a cornerstone of their experiences. Some interviewees in Boddington expressed a clear need for formal English language instruction, often in the context of advancing the formal recognition of English skills and of their non-Australian qualifications in order to take up professional employment. Nina, for example, commented that:
I would be so happy if I have English classes here, because I need to do my ITS test.

Yes and I will be so happy but I don’t like driving to Perth to the classes.

Public transport in Boddington is very limited: attending such classes in Perth (100 kilometers away) involves a long drive on country roads which requires both an Australian Drivers’ License and a roadworthy car. At the same time, the lack of formal/more advanced classes in Boddington or nearby, is discounted by Nina in terms of what might be called a classic rural/urban binary in which the rural (little towns, slow pace) is contrasted unfavourably with ‘the city’:

It’s a little town. It’s going slow, no rush. I really appreciate coming here, not a city. It is good for me and this part is really good and the only problem is the English. It will be hard [to take] English classes.

While none of the interviewees in Boddington were in paid work, some of our Armagh participants were employed. Though some spoke of learning English in the workplace, others were quick to point out that opportunities in this regard and the level of skill attainable would depend on the job in question. This is borne out in the literature (e.g., Hunter, 2012) which shows that the development of English language skills in workplaces is far from straightforward and is tied to the needs of particular sectors, positions and workplace cultures. Learning English in this way is also unlikely to assist in developing the command of English required to ‘just live here’ and to be able to ‘cope somehow’ (Focus group interviewee #4). As part of the broader capacities for everyday living, participants foregrounded the need for self-expression:

We are able to communicate. We cope somehow. But...we have some difficulties – when you speak in Polish you can express yourself so easily, you can talk about your
feelings, emotions, everything that is important. But when you want to say the same things in English it’s much more difficult. I have difficulties, and other girls have them too. (Focus group interviewee #1).

Though formal ESL tuition was at least a local possibility for women in Armagh, informal classes were seen to be of particular benefit, and more inclusive than those offered at the college. Participants confirmed that ‘every woman’ is welcome at the community centre and argued that the classes are more suited to those who are shy, or feel insecure in their abilities.

**English language training and multi-cultural spaces**

Though the need to develop a strong command of English was very much foregrounded in our data, participation in the ESL groups was about much more than learning English. This is neatly encapsulated by Vanna speaking of how she felt in the early months of living in Boddington:

> Everything was hard, speaking English, cultural is different.

Informal ESL classes served to provide broader cultural education/knowledge in both study sites. Sophia in Boddington commented:

> So lucky there is an ESL group. We can ask about Australian culture and – yeah. So yeah, I can talk with [the teacher], asking about anything that I want to know.

Migrant women, including those with more advanced English skills, found the ESL meetings to be a very important part of their everyday lives. A Boddington interviewee described how she was introduced to the ESL classes:

> Just come here every Thursday maybe. Just here so we can teach it together. Maybe you need something, you need help, just talk to us in here so we can help you about

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3 This has been written about in some detail in Mayes and Koshy (in press).
everything so just bring your kids. Maybe you need sport or something, a library, so a library here, maybe you have a baby, maybe you need toys to borrow so just come here. Just come here, we help you, maybe you need something. (Helena)

In Armagh, as exemplified by a participant who became involved in a local group originally to learn English, joining such informal groups provided opportunities to take part in supplementary activities. This participant’s whole family went on day trips organized through the ESL group, resulting in exposure to a diverse group of people and opportunities to discuss experiences of accessing services, jobs and education. These encounters develop social understanding and cultural capital.

Further, the community centre groups provided emotional and practical support to migrant women. For example, during a focus group in Armagh one participant mentioned that she was experiencing racism:

I can’t even leave my house. Because my neighbour permanently blocks my driveway. As if it was his car park. It’s an access way for all neighbours, but he acts as if it was his private car park. So do his friends. And when I try to talk to him, all he says is: go back to your own country, you so-and-so… (Focus group interviewee #2)

Among a number of suggestions and offers of support was advice to “report it to our community centre” (interviewee #4).

The sites of the classes were also important, reinforcing the intersection of language with other aspects of incorporation. Interviewees in both Boddington and Armagh described their isolation in their homes as a result of lack of English competence (or confidence around this). This was particularly evident when women were pregnant or had responsibilities for the

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4 Several women then recounted their own experiences of racism though each instance was presented as having been resolved confronting the perpetrators.
care of young children and were thus more likely to be ‘housebound’. For migrant mothers, the English classes organized at/through the community centres made a big difference. In the words of one Armagh participant: “It has brought me back to life” (interviewee #1). The ESL instruction that was available in Boddington, also offered through the local community centre, was undertaken in a range of venues including the (only) local café. Not only did participation in the ESL classes thus involve (and indeed encourage) interaction in very visible public venues and meeting places—in turn creating a space for migrant women in this small ‘close-knit’ and racially-homogenous local community. The informal English classes were further used as a stepping stone by migrant women, not only to acquire the confidence and skills to attend college classes, but also, importantly, to find their way in Armagh. Through these classes migrant women found out about a computer club for their children and from that they participated in family excursions and cultural celebration days. English language education in this rural setting, as in Boddington, offered accessible routes into the local community and helped to create multicultural spaces. Spatial integration greatly enhances relations between longstanding residents and newcomers as it helps to create multicultural space (Miraftab and McConnell, 2008).

The provision and consumption of ESL classes in both Boddington and Armagh—along with other entangled supports such as, for example, assistance with completing forms, and advocacy in various situations—played a crucial role in migrant experiences of and inclusion in these rural places. Migrant support networks are of immense value to migrants; however they can forestall migrant integration into the host society (Gilmartin and Migge, 2016). The Boddington and Armagh community ESL classes, in the absence of such networks, played a crucial role in fostering emotional and practical connections with (often
highly-respected) local community support figures (the teachers), and in the development of local knowledges.

**Expectations of and encounters with formal education**

The ESL education opportunities and related cultural capital helped the women in both Boddington and Armagh with personal development and to ‘cope’. The informal education also boosted their understanding of the ‘system’ and of more formal structures. A central aspect of this for those with school age children was the encounter with formal education. At the same time, for migrants with children, the local primary school is often a key site of encounter with the host culture and members of the local community.

In Boddington, where most interviewees had young children, the women’s experiences of the local community and the local geography were deeply informed by their roles and subjectivities as migrant mothers living with their children. As Yasmin perceived it, Boddington was ‘a good environment for my kids’ while in Vanna’s estimation: ‘Boddington is good for families with little kids, and for old people’. More specifically, participants felt that, as Nina expressed it, their ‘kids are more happy here.’ Importantly, this happiness was related to their children’s apparent enjoyment of primary school education, which was seen to ‘encourage [the children] to be more confident’ (Yasmin). This was then related to rurality: for example, Yasmin interpreted the emphasis on confidence building and the children’s happiness as happening ‘maybe because here it’s in the country.’ Nina’s understanding was that:

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5 This is not to say that fathers are not involved in their children’s education.
6 “At June 2010, the percentage of the Boddington population aged between 15 and 25 (9.8%) was the lowest in the Peel and substantially lower than in Rockingham, Perth, and WA (all around 14 to15%). At the other end of the scale, the percentage of the population aged 65 and above (13.8%) was also relatively low for the region and marginally higher than in Rockingham (12.6%) and the State (12.1%).” (Mayes 2012: 103)
the Australian education [system is] looking for kids to be more sure about themselves. The teaching is to be a good person. I think it’s not bad, because I know [my child] hates the school in [home country], but he loves, he is so happy here.

However, Nina went on to say that the education ‘is not too good,’ further commenting that ‘maybe it’s because we are in a little town [that] I don’t see too much homework’ (emphasis added). Nina’s concern at the absence of homework, was also foregrounded by other interviewees. For example, Sofia reflected that:

I want more from the school for the kid because sometime I saw homework [but] not always – not always there is homework for [child’s name] and because we saw in [home country] education they push, they push, push, push, push.

In similar terms to Sofia, Nina noted (to start with, of her home country):

They say, study, study, study, no toys, no games, but here [Boddington] in first grade, it’s still playing. […] for me, it’s disorganised, I don’t understand but looks like it works and I say to [husband] maybe Australia change that or doing this, because it looks like it’s better, you know, to educate the kids like that, you know.

As these extracts make clear, migrant mothers struggled to understand and evaluate the approach to learning undertaken in the local primary school, and to reconcile this with the more aggressive – ‘push, push’ and ‘study, study’—modes in operation in their countries of origin.

We interpret the pedagogies experienced in Boddington as ‘invisible’ in that they do not, as described by our interviewees, involve (sufficient) visible techniques such as
homework, and are experienced as ‘disorganised’ and as play (as opposed to structured learning and evaluation). Though this embedded approach, according to Sriprakash et al. (2016) is employed on a national scale, the elements of an ‘invisible’ pedagogy stand out to study participants in Boddington, who in some cases further link it to rurality. Importantly, these experiences of (rural) education, as recounted above, were juxtaposed with experiences of ‘home’ cultures and visible pedagogies. Migrant mothers’ subjective view of education in Boddington, their critique of a pedagogy that they see as related to, if not a product of, Boddington as ‘rural’ place, is informed by transnational labour geographies and attendant transnational experiences of and expectations for children’s education and social capital. Their interpretations are also informed by individual ‘home’ cultural values and expectations. However, as Sriprakash et al. (2016) argue in relation to their participants’ interpretations, this is also a considered evaluation (with clearly defined outcomes) of the capacities of the Australian education system to produce students able to compete for places at selective secondary and tertiary institutions. Even though these invisible pedagogies are seen positively there was nevertheless a clear sense that more was needed, and participants sought strategies that would mitigate, or indeed eliminate, the perceived shortcomings in the invisible pedagogy informing the teaching in the Boddington primary school.

Several interviewees commented on a family who were taking their children to the city on the weekends for classes in the language of origin, just as one interviewee noted that she regularly took her children to the city to receive religious instruction. However in several cases the additional classes were sought in order to secure educational competitive advantage in preparation for what was construed as an unknown (unsettled) future context, marked by transnational complexities and difference. As Sofia explained:
So we decided to go to lessons every Saturday in Perth in North Shore, in Lynwood. Yeah. There is like school every Saturday so [child’s name] got mathematic lessons and English to help to catch [child’s name] – like to be competitive with the other kid, the school in Perth. Yeah, because we worry we’re not – we don’t know in future if we stay here for long or – yeah. So we must prepare our kid with the good education.

Others talked about their plan to move to the city, or other locations:

Just maybe when my kids are, you know, maybe in year five or they need better education, so I have to move. (Yasmin).

Nina mentioned her friends in other (non-Australian) mining location whose ‘kids go to the private international school and it’s a really good school.’ She went on to note that if her husband was to work in South America then her children would have access to such private international schools.

These enacted and mooted educational strategies demonstrate complex interrelations of choice and multi-scalar spatial mobility in the acquisition of educational and social capital (Waters, 2006). This is not an option available to all migrants and, as the Boddington case illustrates, it requires a degree of spatial mobility involving either regular travel to urban centers or further migration to an urban/city location or indeed another country. Such mobility, in this case, is both enabled and constrained by the needs of the global mining industry: workers must go where there are jobs (but can long-distance commute) while the high wages paid to skilled mine workers in Australia (during ‘boom’ conditions) supports additional costs for education.
At the same time, these potential relocations are a response to an increasing geographic differentiation of educational opportunities, and itself contributes to the undervaluing of rural educational spaces\(^7\). This (far from straightforward) capacity for mobility in the pursuit of educational / human capital reproduces rural spaces/places as inadequate. It also links rural spaces to public education, whereas the city is linked to choice and private education, just as it highlights classed dimensions of mobility and rurality. This is underscored if we consider the Armagh site which engaged with unskilled and semi-skilled migrants. They did not have the economic capital necessary to access private education, even though some of them expressed concerns about the inadequacy of the public education in Armagh. Indeed, many of them struggled to understand the state education system, and relied on informal ESL classes and other social spaces for vital information. However, some of them took their children to Saturday Schools that employed ‘visible’ pedagogies, as is implicit in the emphasis on ‘old-fashioned’ teaching:

there is a Polish school …It’s really old fashioned…I talked to the lady there and she said that most of the Polish schools in the UK were like, I don’t know if you have a word for this in English, it’s kind of like a folk museum almost. It is so old fashioned you know, even culture-wise there would be folk dances and it’s just really old fashioned (Polish female 13\(^{th}\) June 2013).

This participant went on to describe the attention given to the precise written formation of letters (likened to ‘copperplate’), noting the way that what ‘a child is taught in the Irish School’ which was not as strict in this regard would be contradicted in the Polish school:

\(^7\)Interestingly, at the time of our fieldwork the student/teacher ratio at Boddington, often seen to be an indicator of ‘quality’ education was 13.3 students to each teacher whereas the state average is 14.6 students per teacher (Mayes, 2012). However the high school took students to grade 10 as opposed to grade 12 as needed for university admittance; students then either took up vocational training, attended a high school in another town, or entered the workforce (Mayes, 2012).
So that child is taught in the Irish school and then goes to the Polish school and is told that ‘it is wrong to write in this way, you need to write like this…’ (Participant puts on a deep and stern voice).

It is notable that this woman was a teacher working in education in Northern Ireland and she had strong views on the pedagogic approaches used by Saturday Schools. Not everyone shared her views as there are currently eleven Polish Saturday Schools across the region (Polish Educational and Cultural Association http://peca-ni.org/polish-schools-ni/).

**Conclusion**

We set out to examine the ways in which labour migration and educational encounters intersect in rural NIDs. While economic factors may primarily drive migration, those individual strategies are not reducible to single factors – education and family considerations feature strongly. Meanwhile structural forces determine the possibilities open to individuals and often create forces into which they are drawn, such as recruitment processes. Migrants are caught up in transnational circuits where their (educational) frame of reference is located in their country of origin, while the options for realizing those expectations are determined in the host society. Formal education may not meet expectations that are tied to traditional ‘visible’ pedagogic approaches, compelling migrant families to take action to address perceived shortcomings. Class is a useful indicator of the expected way in which those families will react, with professionals opting for exclusive supplementary private education while those on lower wages seek suitable community-based solutions where possible. This study thus adds to the literature interrogating the importance of education as a transnational middle-class strategy linked to labour migration rather than as primary driver. It also expands our understanding of these strategies to include the practices of working class
mothers and labour migrants. This research suggests that family educational aspirations, embedded in/ facilitated by labour migration, can inform the trend toward ‘multiple, circular and return migrations’ now characterizing contemporary transnational migration as opposed to the traditional ‘singular great journey from one sedentary space to another’ (Yeoh, Graham and Boyle, 2002, p. 1).

Importantly, our research shows that education intersects with many other facets of migrants’ daily lives. In particular, informal ESL education can function as sites of inclusion and can bolster understanding of more formal social structures. Attending to experiences and discourses of education through the eyes of women migrants with children, has highlighted nuanced intersections with the experiences of rural places and the development of local knowledges and capacities to ‘just live there’.
References


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