Chapter 6
The New Colombo Plan: Transforming Australian Higher Education’s Outward Mobility Programs?

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ABSTRACT
The study is mainly based on a critical literature review as well as analysis of publicly available materials on the Australian Government’s New Colombo Plan (NCP). The authors argue that the existing normative frames on outward student mobility (OSM), as reviewed through analysis of the Australian Government’s NCP policy and the relevant literature, tend towards an unhelpful polarization that encourages a discourse. It is often fused with ideological elements imposed by institutional, government, corporate, and scholarly sources. It is difficult to locate literature which assesses the participating outward-bound students’ voices and aspirations without prejudice. Thus, the existing normative frames covering OSM in Australian higher education require revision.

INTRODUCTION
Tertiary education we suggest, as a form of higher education, inherently implies notions of positive transformation for individuals as well as contributing to progressive social, regional, and even global change (Patel, Li, & Piscioneri, 2014). One aspect of higher education that has been historically accorded a type of progressive moral mission, is that of outward student mobility [OSM]. The OSM contributed to not only individuals’ positive transformation but also society’s development on the local, regional and even global levels. Outbound and outward student mobility are used interchangeably throughout this article. Australian tertiary students’ international experience (e.g., outward bound mobility on exchange) has, arguably, been accorded a marginal position in the discourse of internationalization of Australian higher education. Some notable exceptions include Nunan (2006), Bell (2008), Crossman & Clark (2010), Forsey, Broomhall, and Davis (2012) and Dall’Alba & Sindhu (2015). Leask (2001) and Rizvi

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(2011) suggested outward-bound as well as inward-bound student mobility has played a significant role in positive processes of internationalizing higher education, in Australia and globally. Overall, a range of strategies has been used to encourage Australian students to become mobile:

*In making their arguments for mobility schemes, known variously as Study Abroad or Exchange programmes, university researchers and administrators have portrayed student mobility as a vital dimension of higher education’s internationalisation and a crucial institutional response to the imperatives of ‘globalisation’ and regionalisation.* (Dall’Alba & Sindhu, 2015, p. 721)

Bell (2008, p. 130) noted that only a very small number of Australian tertiary students historically have studied abroad: “In 2003 less than 1% of Australian students were travelling abroad for study”. Yet Australian tertiary institutional supported for OSM remains strong (for example: Monash University, 2017; University of Melbourne, 2017; University of Queensland, 2017), and the number of Australian tertiary level students participating in outward mobility programs has steadily increased in the last decade. *Universities Australia* reported that “the data revealed that student mobility is continuing to grow. In 2012, there was a total 24,866 overseas study experiences undertaken by Australian university students” (Universities Australia, 2013).

Before the 2013 Australian Federal election, both major Australian political groupings outlined competing but equally substantial commitments to this feature of higher education: the Asia-Bound Grants program introduced by the ALP in July 2013 (AEL, 2013) and the New Colombo Plan proposed by the Liberal-National Party (Australianpolitics, 2013). Following the 2013 Australian Federal Election, the successful Liberal-National Party launched its flagship Outward Student Mobility (OSM) program: the New Colombo Plan (NCP). The initiative provides the authors with the opportunity to examine the prevailing norms and values which the Australian Government prioritises in terms of outward-bound student mobility.

The original Colombo Plan was established by the Australian Federal Government in the 1950s and continued until 1980s (Auletta, 2000; NMA, 2017). The focus of the original Colombo Plan was the provision of scholarships to support students mostly at the postgraduate level and primarily from the Asia-Pacific Region to study in Australia. The Australian Government’s new Colombo Plan reverses the direction of the mobility: support instead for Australian students to study, research and intern in the Indo-Pacific Region. Prior to the NCP, Australian Government funding for OSM has taken various forms: specific grants in the form of scholarships provided under the Endeavour Awards Scheme, for example, International Students Exchange Program, Study Overseas Short-Term Mobility Program, Endeavour Cheung Kong Student Exchange Program, Asia Postgrad, VET Outbound, Asia VET (DET, 2017a).

The study is mainly based on a critical literature review method supported by content analysis of publically available materials on the Australian Government’s New Colombo Plan (NCP). Selection of the content samples was guided by a ‘deductive’ technique often applied in this type of study. In a deductive approach to analysis of textual content or a corpus, a set of themes are identified prior to the text examination by the researchers (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Moretti et al., 2011). A keyword search via the Google search engine of online materials was next conducted, using keywords such as ‘new Colombo plan’ and ‘Australian government new Colombo plan’. The first ten search engine results from each of the searches were chosen for analysis as indicative of the most highly optimized and therefore ‘available’ content. Overall, in terms of any theoretical or conceptual framework shaping our approach to the issues under consideration. The authors have sought to adopt a non-partisan perspective.
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