

Social Integration of International Students - encouraging the formation of friendships with local students in the mainstream secondary school context

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The international student experience is often diminished by the lack of integration with domestic students.

A New Zealand study by Professor Colleen Ward (presented at the ISANA 2005 conference), showed that poor integration in tertiary contexts links to poor language skills and possibly the development of large marginalised ghettos whereas, more frequent and more satisfying contacts with local students, leads to better adjustment and an increased chance of student success.

The purpose of this paper is to share the practical ways in which teachers at Kelvin Grove State College (Qld) have attempted to improve contact between international and local students using the award winning Teaching Emphases for English Proficiency Levels (TEEPL) http://www.kelvingrovesc.eq.edu.au/asp/teep/teep_cover.asp (presented at ISANA conference 2005)

The issue of poor rates of interaction between local and international students at KGSC was initially raised via a) year 12 local students who labelled one area of the school 'Chinatown' because it was almost exclusively frequented by Chinese students during lunch times and b) several mainstream teachers who expressed concern that their ISP students were not making friends with local students. In an attempt to help, the ESL staff designed a survey for international students in order to highlight any gaps between expectations prior to arrival and actual experiences. From informal discussions, the ESL teachers suspected that student frequency of informal contact with local students was lower than what they expected before coming to Australia. Some said they never connect with locals even though they want to.

In addressing the issue, ESL staff drew on suggestions given in the TEEPL materials to develop workshops designed to increase the quantity and quality of contact between domestic and international students. The weekly workshops conducted over two terms, were supplemented with between workshop activities (BWA's) involving practice of skills learnt with an expectation to feed back in the ensuing workshop.

Students were selected to participate in the course based on bandscale level (i.e., lower level students in listening and speaking), year level and desire to be involved. Course enrolment was on a voluntary basis with rewards in place to encourage participation e.g., special workshops, gift vouchers, funded social outings.

At the end of the course a second survey will be issued to determine the level of efficacy.

This paper will be of interest to anyone involved in helping international students meet the social and academic demands of school life.