

Moving Towards Independence: International Student Needs Beyond the Classroom

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Abstract

Fitting into a new culture brings many preconceived expectations and uncertainties, particularly for students who are also navigating the complications of adolescence. As adolescents, international students attending secondary schools still require the help and confidence of adults who they respect and with whom they can confide safely. This paper reports some of the findings from a survey and interviews investigating the needs of international students attending secondary schools. Overseas students in a variety of care settings were invited to comment regarding their settlement in Australia. There were 318 questionnaire respondents and eighteen students participated in the interviews. The study was examining the factors that enable them to move from requiring considerable support upon arrival to functioning confidently and independently within the Australian environment.

Three main factors emerged from the research. The first involved the preconceived expectations held by the students prior to arrival, and how these impacted their experiences upon arrival. The second factor involved the link between friendship patterns and communicative competence. Finally, the role of significant adults associated with the international students' lives was examined.

Key words

International students, adolescent, welfare, culture, settlement, friendship

Introduction

The number of international student programs that have been offered by educational institutions in Australia has grown exponentially since the 1980's (Baker, Roberson, Taylor & Doube, 1996). Indeed, international education has become one of Australia's most prominent exports (Linacre, 2007). Due to the rapid growth of the industry, legal policies and care requirements for overseas students have evolved, and they continue to develop in order to meet the needs of the students. It is also recognised that because different programs target specific clientele (the students), the legal and ethical expectations of educational institutions vary.

Secondary schools, in particular, have a greater responsibility than tertiary institutions regarding the care of their overseas students. The main reason is that the majority of international students involved in secondary school programs are under eighteen, and thus, they require ongoing adult supervision and emotional support. Some of the challenges for adolescent international students are the same as for over eighteens. For example, all overseas students need to function in new educational and cultural environments. They are also required to operate in both formal and informal settings using a foreign language. While adjusting to these significant life changes, school aged students are also navigating puberty, developing a sense of self, and trying to understand social relationships. All of these adjustments are often faced without the support of their parents or other significant adults in their lives. Therefore, in order to cater to these specific needs, schools have set in place a number of support structures.

The Process of International Student Support

Because international students often leave behind the security of parents and friends, they require support in order to help them adjust to their new surroundings. The international student's journey begins when the decision is made to study overseas. Often they hold an idealistic image of what they expect from their

international experience. However, many times their preconceived ideas fade in the face of reality once they arrive at their destination.

In an ideal world, the initial support begins when the decision to study overseas is made. Often there will be agents who liaise between the international students and the potential schools. Many of the former provide the students with information about living in Australia as well as background about the prospective school. Some foreign students also have the opportunity to attend information sessions or cross-cultural programs that are aimed at advising them regarding some of the cross-cultural difficulties they may encounter.

On the other hand, a number of students prefer to obtain their own reading material from the internet in order to form an impression of where they will be living. Many prospective students also glean impressions of the Australian lifestyle from family or friends who already live in Australia, and in some instances they will have travelled to Australia for a holiday. While there appears to be a plethora of information available to prospective students, the criticism is that it often does not address important issues such as educational differences, separation from family and friends and language difficulties (Dalglish et al. 2006).

When an international student arrives in Australia it is generally accepted that they will undergo a period of adjustment, where they are heavily reliant on others to help them fit into the unfamiliar environment. Ideally, as the students familiarise themselves with their new surroundings, they will become more independent and confident when interacting within the target culture. For some, this expectation becomes reality, but for others, their experience is fraught with significant difficulties for the duration of their stay.

One of the first experiences an overseas student has on arrival is when they are taken to their new home. Most international students attending secondary schools are placed in either a boarding house, or homestay¹. Alternatively, some students decide to live with relatives. Whatever the form of accommodation, it is the responsibility of each school to ensure that all overseas students, who are minors, are placed under the care of adults. To facilitate this process, many schools use independent homestay agents to find an appropriate residence for their new pupils.

Schools with overseas students also provide a number of other support structures to assist their pupils. There are often International Student Coordinators (who liaise with the students), and other staff members (such as English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, tutors, homeroom teachers, and boarding house carers) are involved in the care of international students. New students also may find assistance from other overseas students who have been in Australia for some time. However, although there are many forms of help for on-arrival students, the question remains: What are the structures that are the most effective in helping international students move from being highly dependent upon others to functioning independently in their new environment? In particular, the present research investigates the following issues:

- To what extent does pre-arrival preparation assist international students to settle into Australia upon arrival?
- To what degree is communicative competence related to the well-being of international students?
- What kinds of adult support do adolescent international students require while they are in Australia?

Cross-cultural Training and Pre-arrival Preparation

It is widely accepted that many travellers benefit from receiving cross-cultural information prior to arriving in a new country. More specifically, a number of cross-cultural scholars have highlighted the need for intercultural training (e.g. Seelye & Seelye-James, 1995; Ward, Furnham & Bochner, 2001; O'Sullivan, 1994). In terms of international businesses, workers are often given such instruction as a part of their on-going professional development (e.g. Multimedia Languages and Marketing, 2007; Polygot Group, 2006; International Consultants Centre, 2003). While corporations may provide intercultural guidance for their employees, there seems to be a paucity of similar information available to students who come to Australia to study (Dalglish et al. 2006). Recently, Australian Education International released a *Guide to Studying and Living in Australia* (2007), which aims to give international students an overview of information regarding life here. It has been translated into a number of languages. While this may be a move in the right direction, a number of difficulties remain. The guide is designed to be a broad overview, which, by definition, lacks explication of the issues. There is also very

¹ The term 'homestay' is currently not found in the vast majority of English dictionaries. The Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary defines homestay (noun) as: "a stay at a residence by a traveller and especially by a visiting foreign student who is hosted by a local family". While the term can also be used for bed-and-breakfast services in the tourism industry, the context in which it is used in this paper refers specifically to the form of accommodation offered to international students.

little information in the guide to help international students to cope with cross-cultural or language difficulties. Furthermore, there is a negligible amount of information provided specifically for the needs of students under eighteen. Obviously, recipients of the guide may benefit by perusing it, but there is no guarantee that it will be read. The guide also provides websites for the students to visit, although there are no avenues for prospective students to call an expert in order to clarify their uncertainties before they arrive.

Communicative Competence

Much of an international student's success after they arrive in an Australian school depends on their ability to communicate effectively in English. Therefore, developing communicative competence is essential to their sense of well-being. The term *communicative competence* encompasses all aspects of communication:

[It] includes knowledge the speaker-hearer has of what constitutes appropriate as well as correct language behaviour, and also of what constitutes effective language behaviour in relation to particular communicative goals. That is, it includes both linguistic and pragmatic knowledge (Ellis 1994:13).

This means that the ability to understand and speak English is not enough for a person to be considered competent in English. They must also understand subtleties of meaning as well as culturally bound inferences.

Even though gaining communicative competence may be difficult for many learners, students who spend time interacting with people from the target language are the most successful. According to Ellis (1994, p.237) "Learners who are motivated to integrate develop both a high level of L2² proficiency and better attitudes". Therefore, forming friendships with local students may present a number of advantages for international students. Not only are they able to practice English, they may acquire an understanding of culturally bound aspects of the Australian vernacular, such as humour (Hofstede, 1997). Once international students have made friends with local students, they also have access to people in the wider community. Gaining confidence in English and interacting with those in the target culture is also necessary because "Language self-confidence is associated not only with psychological adjustment, but also with socio-cultural difficulty" (Yang, Noels & Saumure, 2005).

While conversing with target language speakers is necessary for building communicative competence, it is often difficult for international students to approach a local. For students who speak English as a second or foreign language, approaching native English speakers can be intimidating. Overseas pupils are often uncertain regarding the behaviours and language required to develop relationships with Australians. This can lead to a fear of making mistakes. Therefore, international students may avoid situations where they might need to converse with their local peers (Spencer-Rogers & McGovern, 2002). This evasion may impinge on the international student's self-esteem and developing sense of identity.

Adolescent Identity formation and Adult influence: A cross-cultural perspective

The literature suggests that it is in adolescence that the social identity of a child is fashioned (Ma et al. 2000; Greenwald 1988). However, though there has been research into adolescent social development, the study of cultural variations in social development is still in its infancy (Chen et al. 2003; Rosenthal & Feldman 1996). It is only over the past decade that the number of studies investigating adolescent social development within the Chinese context has grown (Chen et al. 2003; Ma et al. 2000; Lau 1996). In particular some of the research has explored the roles of adults, such as parents and VIPs³, in the social and academic development of Chinese teenagers (Chen et al. 2003; Ma et al. 2000; Shek 1997).

Research into the cross-cultural evolution of self and social identity indicates that the role of parents is crucial in Chinese adolescent development. Ma et al (2000 p.75) suggest that '... parental influences tend to reduce antisocial behaviour and increase prosocial behaviour in adolescents.' A difficulty then arises for international students who are facing their teen years in Australia, because a significant number of them are unable to live with their parents. Moreover, the difficulties associated with identity in adolescent international students are compounded due to the fact that they are trying to develop a sense of self within an unfamiliar cultural context (Rosenthal & Feldman 1996). Taking the absence of parents and the unfamiliar cultural context into consideration, it is important that international students are able to develop a trusting relationship with a caring adult with whom they have frequent personal contact.

² Second Language

³ The adults who are referred to in the literature as VIPs are '... non-parental adults who have had a significant influence on the adolescent and on whom the adolescent can rely for support' (Chen et al 2003, p.35).

Method

In order to study the perceptions of international students and their carers, the current research has used a mixed method approach. It has utilised qualitative interviews and focus groups, as well as a questionnaire, which asked participants for both qualitative and quantitative information. Ten secondary schools with international student programs (comprising Catholic and private schools) from the Melbourne metropolitan regions participated. The data was collected in four stages:

- Staff from the ten schools were interviewed in order to compile information about each school's programs and perspectives in relation to international student needs. These representatives were key stakeholders involved in international student programs at the schools, such as Registrars, Heads of Boarding Houses and International Student Coordinators.
- Questionnaires were distributed to the international students, who were studying at the participating schools. The questionnaires were designed to draw information regarding the students' backgrounds, interests, accommodation, communicative competence in English and their overall sense of well-being. Participation was voluntary, and 318 usable questionnaires were returned. Information regarding communicative competence was cross-tabulated with the results from a 5-point Likert Scale⁴ dealing with international student well-being and interactions within the Australian context (see Appendix 1) Schedules were designed to explore the respondents' sense of well-being, culture shock symptoms and confidence in functioning within the Australian environment. These items were analysed using SPSS 15.0 for Windows. The results from the Chi-Square analyses were cross-checked using the Mann-Whitney Test. For the purpose of this study, significance has been set at $p < 0.05$.
- One-on-one and focus group interviews (see Appendix 2) were conducted with international students who had volunteered to participate. In order to ensure anonymity, all eighteen students participating in the interviews were given pseudonyms and any identifying features (such as place names) were removed. The focus groups were held to acquire information about experiences in Australia, and their views on friendship. Students were also asked to give advice regarding future programs.
- Interviews with four representatives from different organisations that were either directly or indirectly involved in international student welfare. Participating schools recommended organisations to participate because of known best practice in international student care. Analysis was undertaken using Miles and Huberman (1994) type approach.

Results

Participant profiles

The international students participating in the questionnaire came from many different national and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, for the purpose of analysis they were divided into five regional groups: China (Mainland); China (Hong Kong); North East Asia (South Korea, Japan, Taiwan); South Asia (Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia); and Other (Nauru, Kiribati, USA, England, Holland, Canada, Singapore⁵, France, Brazil and Finland). The largest group by far was Mainland China comprising nearly 44% of the questionnaire participants (see Table 1).

Although there were more females taking part in the research, males constituted nearly half (46.2%) of the respondents (see Table 1). The international students who participated in the study were aged between thirteen to twenty one years. The largest age group was the sixteen to eighteen year olds, who comprised 68.6% of the respondents (see Table 2).

⁴ The Likert Scale (Appendix 1) was developed by the researcher with a number of issues in mind: 1) It was aimed at young people who had limited knowledge of English; 2) The statements were written in the first person in order for the respondents to be able to identify more easily with the ideas; 3) The researcher wanted to establish an overview of general well-being, culture shock and levels of interaction with local students. Because the participants were young the researcher had to frame these questions to be concise and easy to understand. A factor analysis and reliability test yielded two reliable scales ($\alpha > 0.7$) relating to the respondents' feelings of integration with local students and their well-being.

⁵ Singapore was placed in the 'other' group (along with the other English speaking countries) for a number of reasons: English is one of the official languages of Singapore and the first language of many residents; it is the language of instruction; and, it is also the primary language of commerce.

Table 1. International Students: Regional Background by Gender

	Total cases	Gender	
		Male	Female
China (Mainland)	139 (43.7%)	59 (42.4%)	80 (57.6%)
China (Hong Kong)	36 (11.3%)	16 (44.4%)	20 (55.6%)
North East Asia	54 (17.0%)	22 (40.7%)	32 (59.3%)
South Asia	72 (22.6%)	43 (59.7%)	29 (40.3%)
Other	17 (5.3%)	7 (41.2%)	10 (58.8)
Total	318 (100.0%)	147 (46.2%)	171 (53.8%)

Table 2. International students: Regional Background by Age

	Age		
	13-15	16-18	19-21
China (Mainland)	2 (1.4%)	77 (55.4%)	60 (43.2%)
China (Hong Kong)	3 (8.3%)	26 (72.2%)	7 (19.4%)
North East Asia	10 (18.5%)	39 (72.2%)	5 (9.3%)
South Asia	5 (6.9%)	63 (87.5%)	4 (5.6%)
Other	4 (23.5%)	13 (76.5%)	0 (0%)
Total	24 (7.5%)	218 (68.6%)	76 (23.9%)

Findings and Discussion

The international students' ability to settle into their new life in Australia appeared to be influenced by three major factors:

1. Both the amount of preparation that international students had before arriving in Australia, as well as the means by which the information was obtained, impacted upon the expectations held by the students. This, in turn, affected the degree of difficulty they experienced adjusting to the Australian environment.
2. English language competence was directly linked with the students' capacity to interact with their Australian peers.
3. The adolescents participating in this research desired a meaningful relationship with an adult (VIP), who could offer them advice and a sense of security.

These three factors are now discussed in more detail.

Pre-arrival preparation and expectation

Perhaps it is not surprising that the extent of preparation that was made by the respondents prior to arriving in Australia was closely linked with the struggles they faced after they arrived. While it is natural to imagine what life in a foreign country would be like, it is important that the information which is presented to the would-be international students provides them with a realistic perspective about Australian culture. Without this, it is likely that students will form idealistic expectations of life in Australia. As the following extract from a focus group demonstrates:

Student 1: Before I came here I thought everything would be great.

Student 2: Yeah, that's what I thought.

Student 1: And Aussie girls would make friends with you.

Student 2: And the campus would be really nice and we would enjoy walking.

Student 1: And you would feel very European, I thought.

They shared their disappointment when they found that their expectations of a European, cosmopolitan experience were not realised. Student 1 went on to reveal:

...I hadn't come to Australia before. And then the first time I came it was totally different to my thoughts. And it's not like Europe. And the friends – it's not that easy to make friends with the [Aussie girls].

These students were not alone in their belief that they were not prepared for the experiences that lay before them. Indeed, a number of overseas students (12%) indicated that they had not prepared for their journey at all. It is

understandable, then, that over half of them (54%) felt ill-equipped to deal with the problems that they faced after they arrived in Australia. On the other hand, many participants revealed that they had made some effort to become informed about the experiences that they might face. However, the usefulness of the information amassed before leaving their home country varied depending on the manner in which it was presented.

Information from family

Although many students stated that they had sought advice from family and friends who were living in Australia, 53% of these respondents still felt ill-prepared once they arrived. One possible reason for this is that those who provided the advice may have offered questionable information. This suggests that these informants may have lacked a full understanding of Australian culture and educational ethos.

Previous travel to Australia

Meanwhile, it could be expected that the students who had previously travelled to Australia for vacations would feel more equipped. However, only half such participants felt that they were ready for life as an international student. This may indicate that travellers often visit the tourist attractions and stay in hotels, and students are presented with an 'artificial experience' of Australian culture and lifestyle.

Printed or recorded information

Many others reported that they had read information about Australia, or that they had conducted internet searches about various aspects of life in Australia. Of these students, 53% believed that they were well prepared for their new experience. This figure could reflect the fact that there is now a vast amount of printed or recorded information readily available. However, not all of this information is accurate or reliable.

Formal training programs

Finally, some respondents indicated that they had participated in formal cross-cultural training programs or information sessions, which were presented by professionals. About two thirds of these students (65%) felt that they were equipped for life in Australia. The degree of apparent success of this form of preparation may indicate that these professional educators had an understanding of the needs of international students and could offer a more realistic perspective on the Australian way of life.

Of the students who did not feel prepared when they arrived in Australia, many came to realise that they were not ready to live without their parents. Other students also indicated that their language difficulties contributed to their sense of discomfort, while some found the cultural differences difficult to deal with. These findings concur with the observations made by Dalglish et al. (2006).

The link between friendship and communication

A lack of English language proficiency not only leads to overseas students feeling ill-prepared for life in Australia, it also impacts considerably on their ability to make friends with local students. It was clear that nearly all of the respondents (89%) hoped to establish friendships during their stay in Australia, but 77% of the participants remarked that they had experienced difficulties making friends with Australians. The data suggest that a perceived lack of competence in their ability to communicate in English reduced the overseas students' attempts to forge relationships with their Australian peers a great deal. In fact, 59% of the students who were less confident in their English language proficiency found it almost impossible to make friends with native English speakers. Conversely, nearly two thirds (63%) of the students who felt confident in their communicative abilities had few difficulties making friends with local pupils.

Furthermore, approximately three quarters (74%) of the students, who had little difficulty establishing relationships with native English speakers, felt that they understood Australian humour to some degree. Moreover, the overseas students who did not usually mix with their local peers were not often exposed to the target culture; therefore they did not have as much opportunity to learn about aspects such as Australian wit. Consequently, 61% of these students felt that they were the target of jokes. Conversely, nearly three quarters (72%) of the students who spent more time with English speakers understood that the Australian students were very rarely laughing at them.

In addition, of the students who spent more time with their Australian counterparts, 69% indicated that they felt understood by those in the target culture. On the other hand, 63% of the students who were not on familiar terms with their local peers often felt misunderstood. One possible reason for this discrepancy is that when students from different cultural groups interact frequently, there is opportunity to learn about the other person's way of life. As intercultural friendships grow, the sense of being misunderstood is likely to decrease. Alternatively, when international students are reluctant to form relationships with local students, the consequences can become a cycle of avoiding uncomfortable social situations (such as communicating in English), which leads to a mistrust

of people belonging to the target culture. This results in a heightened sense of angst, thus causing the new arrival to continue to avoid unpleasant situations.

As international students take the opportunity to foster relationships with the local students, it is to be expected that they will become more confident interacting in a variety of social situations. Seventy one percent of international respondents who were confident in their ability to communicate clearly in English believed that they were liked by Australians. However, of the students who were less confident, 54% sensed that Australians generally did not like them. The fact that they felt disliked by those in the target culture can lead to a lack of confidence and timidity when interacting with Australians. Therefore, it is not surprising that 71% of these students reported that they felt shy a great deal of the time.

A sense of shyness and reluctance to participate in English conversations can result in increased levels of anxiety. About three quarters (74%) of the international students experiencing difficulties with communication appeared to be considerably more stressed than their international peers, who were more confident. There are two important catalysts which could explain these students' increased apprehension. Firstly, the students who perceive a lack of English proficiency are likely to worry about their ability to do well academically. The second source of fear could result from the possibility that they may, at times, have to interact with native English speakers.

This negative, self-perpetuating cycle can then lead to a sense of unhappiness and loneliness. Forty nine percent of students indicated that they had problems with communication in English, and so often felt unhappy or lonely (72%) much of the time. From these results it is clear that students who experience on-going difficulties communicating in English tend to have a more difficult time in Australia than their more confident peers. Thus, focussing on building confidence in communicating in English may help some international students to feel more at ease during their stay in Australia.

Friendships with others from similar cultural backgrounds

While language barriers tend to deter international students from forming friendships with local students, they may also encounter ideological barriers in their relationships with students from similar cultural backgrounds. Some international students felt torn between their own expectations to make friends with other students of the same nationality, even if they did not share common values. One student summed up her feelings by stating:

People think you are from the same country, and you are supposed to be united and supposed to be one group. But sometimes you are just like, 'Oh, I don't want to stay with them.' So, it's kind of hard to get away from people and get closer to people.

This sense of obligation towards one's own cultural group establishes artificial social barriers which are based on appearance as well as country of origin. These fixed social boundaries can hinder foreign students from developing trust-based relationships with Australians, which are founded on a sense of affinity or personal compatibility rather than racial background.

Cultural Congruence

In order to traverse such current social barriers, it is necessary to observe both sameness (in terms of affinity and compatibility) and difference separate yet juxtaposed entities. The current paradigm of multiculturalism highlights difference and respect for diversity. However, exclusive attention to cultural diversity without addressing other factors, such as individual compatibilities, cannot be used to build relationships based on trust. Through understanding a model of cultural congruence (Richardson 2007) it can be possible to redefine social boundaries by understanding that both difference and sameness are of equal importance when establishing cross-cultural relationships. In assisting students to explore their similarities, VIP adults may be able to help international and local students to circumnavigate the current paradigm of cultural difference.

VIP Adults' Roles

The absence of parents in the lives of many international students means that these adolescents face additional challenges as they construct their individual and group identities. In general, adolescence is seen as a time of adjustment and vulnerability (Shek 1996). It is during adolescence that one's self-concept is formed, and the individual's understanding of their collective self is developed (Greenwald 1988). Subsequently, international students must construct their adult identity in an unfamiliar culture, often without the support of familiar and trusted adults.

The role of VIP adults is both a crucial and time-consuming component of international student care, particularly when the students first arrive in Australia (Chen et al. 2003; Ma et al. 2000). Chen et al. (2003) found that:

... children and adolescents with extended social networks, especially non-parental adults who were important in their lives, were more likely to show positive outcomes [in terms of social-emotional development] than were those without an extended social network (p.36).

Thus, it is important for overseas students to have the assurance that they can confide in, and receive advice from an adult, who they believe has their best interest at heart. In one of the focus groups, a participant commented that interactions with his VIP adult (who was his Head of House) gave him confidence and a sense that someone cared about him. He explained:

The first time I came here – I'm new, right? I don't know anything about this school. I felt strange and lonely. And my Head of House, he said, 'If you have got any problems come to see me'. Every time, every morning, he said this to me ... I feel it is like he's my older brother or uncle, or whoever. And he looks after me, like a young child and he tells me, and he shows me the way.

A number of students communicated their desire for an adult in Australia to take the role of a VIP. Through the focus group interviews it became clear that many international students attending secondary schools felt that they were facing adolescence alone in a very foreign environment and they needed some form of adult comfort. As one student expressed it:

We really sometimes want someone to talk to, to tell them our feelings and things, because we are here with no relatives ... no friends at all in the beginning. So we need teachers to help us, to be like mums and dads to, well, fix your problems.

This suggestion that teachers could be more closely involved in the pastoral care of international students concurs with the findings of Chen et al (2003). These researchers indicated that a large percentage the Chinese students in their study referred to a teacher as their VIP adult. Moreover, Ma et al. (2000) suggest that the relationships that adolescents form with their teachers can influence prosocial or antisocial behaviour.

Given the tendency for teachers to play a role in influencing Chinese student social development, the question of 'Who is the most appropriate VIP adult for international students within the Australian context?' is raised. Within the Australian context there are a number of structures in place from which students can create relationships with adults. The adults within these structures include teachers, guardians, accommodation carers and other official carers. In spite of these structures, some students indicated that they were confused about who they should consult for help. They were also anxious about approaching the appropriate person. It was pointed out that:

You're meant to search for help, if you get difficulties, from your guardians and from people who look after you. But if they don't know you very well it's really hard for us, and for girls who newly come here. It's really scary to talk to Aussie girls and all the people who speak English.

Through expressing her initial fears about approaching English speakers, this student highlighted a need for the creation of trust-based relationships with adult carers. This is necessary because interaction between VIP adults and international students has the potential to help adolescents from overseas to develop confidence and a sense of competence in operating within the target culture. Thus, students can be enabled to function more independently and confidently while they are in Australia.

Conclusion

The research into international student welfare, which has just been reported, has revealed three factors that can influence the extent to which international students are able to move from reliance on others to functioning confidently and independently in the Australian context. Firstly, it should be recognised that the information presented to prospective international students before they arrive can either prepare them for the reality of life in Australia, or it can reinforce their idealistic expectations. Therefore, it is important that international students be given appropriate information regarding the reality of life in Australia, so that they can feel more confident and prepared when they arrive.

The second factor, which can hinder international student integration into Australian life, is a lack of confidence in their ability to communicate in English. By providing a safe environment in which international students are encouraged to communicate with local students, schools can help to build up the overseas learner's confidence in communicating with Australians. Likewise, encouraging international students to position themselves so that they are able to explore the English language in a safe environment could help to ease their fears of communicating with English speakers.

Furthermore, VIP adults need to assist the integration of international students into the Australian community by helping international and local students to look beyond cultural differences and stereotypes, and to encourage all

2007 ISANA International Conference "Moving Towards Independence: International Student Needs Beyond the Classroom", 27-30 November, Stamford Grand, Glenelg, Adelaide, Australia

students to explore other areas of compatibility. Of particular importance is the fact that VIPs can provide their charges with a sense of security, and offer support when it is needed. Through discussing these issues and attempting to address the difficulties that hinder the progress of overseas adolescent socialisation in secondary schools, it may be possible to assist international students to make the transition from rather disappointed and diffident students to functioning as independent and confident young people within the Australian environment.

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Appendix 1

Student Well-being Likert Scale

Now that you are living in Australia, do you experience any of the following feelings? (Circle a number between 1-5 to indicate the strength of your experience)

	Never	Sometimes	Always		
I feel misunderstood by Australians.	1	2	3	4	5
I get angry about small things.	1	2	3	4	5
I am comfortable being myself around Australians.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel like people are laughing at me.	1	2	3	4	5
I get sick more often than I used to get sick.	1	2	3	4	5
I enjoy discovering new things about Australia.	1	2	3	4	5
I like to eat Australian food.	1	2	3	4	5
I sleep very well.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel like a different person when I am with Australians.	1	2	3	4	5
I worry about my family at home.	1	2	3	4	5
I think about my friends back at home.	1	2	3	4	5
I understand Australian humour.	1	2	3	4	5
I spend more time doing homework in Australia than I did at home.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not want to make friends here.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel shy.	1	2	3	4	5
I sleep more than I used to.	1	2	3	4	5
I have headaches.	1	2	3	4	5
I wake up during the night.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel unhappy.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel more tired than I used to feel in my home country.	1	2	3	4	5
I get stomach aches.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel confident when I am with Australians.	1	2	3	4	5
I find myself behaving in ways that are not culturally acceptable to me.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not get hungry.	1	2	3	4	5
I spend a lot of time by myself.	1	2	3	4	5
I worry about small things.	1	2	3	4	5
I find it easy to make friends with Australians.	1	2	3	4	5
I get bored easily.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel lonely.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel stressed.	1	2	3	4	5
I trust the people around me.	1	2	3	4	5
I find it easy to relax with Australians.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not like food in Australia.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel that many Australians like me.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel healthy when I am in Australia.	1	2	3	4	5
I telephone my parents and friends who are still in my home country.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix 2

Student Focus Group Schedule

Introductory Questions

1. Round Robin

I would like to begin by getting to know you all a little. I will introduce myself first and then I would like each of you to tell me a little bit about yourselves. My name is Katie Richardson and I was born in South Australia. I live in a rented house, and I like to sing, read books and drink coffee with my friends...

2. Think about how you felt before you came to Australia. What did you expect? Was everything the way you expected it to be when you arrived here?

3. Is there anything that you wish you had been told before you came to Australia, but never were?

Transition Questions

4. After you arrived in Australia, what are some of the positive or exciting experiences you have had?

5. Think about the people you like to hang around with. Where do you like to go and what do you like to do with your friends?

6. Have you tried to make friends with Australian students? What are some of your experiences with this?

7. Consider some of the difficulties you have had to deal with since arriving in Australia. What are some of the problems you have faced and how did you overcome them?

8. Many people who go into a different culture have interesting stories to tell about getting used to their accommodation. Have any of you had difficulties or found parts of the Australian way of life strange? Can you give some examples?

Key Questions

9. If one of your friends from your home country wanted to study in Australia, what advice would you give them?

10. Lets think about the services you are offered by schools and other organisations (such as your accommodation, after school or weekend activities, activities to help you understand Australians better, etc.). What kinds of programs do you think you would like, which would make your stay in Australia better? What advice would you give to the people who look after you?

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