

Module Three – Creating Communities Part 2

Local knowledge and cultural capital is often something that is taken for granted. Sometimes it can be a case of not realizing gaps in students' knowledge about where they live until problems arise. How much information does your Centre provide in regards to some of these things that might be unfamiliar when students arrive in Australia? Not all of these things have to be relayed to students in their first week or listed in their Student Handbook. Teachers may want to incorporate some of these things into lessons, particularly when it relates to what they are doing in class. Community policing representatives are always happy to facilitate talks and presentations on road safety, reporting incidences and personal safety, and it can remove students' fear of the police that may be innate in their home country. Knowing about proof of age cards or alternate forms of ID could prevent a student losing their passport on a night out. Being aware of local transport options, possible concessions available and travel card registration (in case it's lost) can help students save money as well as reduce stress and worry when incidents do arise. Having access to information about work rights, minimum wages, contracts and reporting workplace accidents is essential in preventing vulnerable students from being exploited by employers. If students are being underpaid, they will then work more than their visa allows, which ultimately ends up negatively affecting attendance and performance.

Think about how you can involve students in the creation of your Centre's community. Students are often going to be more engaged and interested in student-led social activities and events, as what we are interested in as staff, possibly from a different generation, may not be the same as the students. Student volunteers, mentors or buddies can indirectly help to promote your Centre, and how well the students improve their English, if they are involved in some of the Orientation activities, such as tours, system log-in support or giving presentations and sharing experiences. Past students who have gone onto study or work successes could talk to current students about how much they gained from their English studies and what it's like when they move on. Student Councils or Representative Groups, often assisted by a willing member of staff, give students a voice and some autonomy over student experience. Providing participation certificates or some kind of recognition of student involvement can be put on a cv or used in a portfolio when applying for a job or an internship in the future. The more students are directly involved in formation of your Centre's community, the better their experience is going to be.