

Cultural Infusion: Intercultural Citizenship Ambassador Program

Executive Summary

ICAP, the Intercultural Citizenship Ambassador Program, is a pioneering new course for Australian schools, International Baccalaureate schools, and progressive school around the world. The two term, two-part course, which is for children in grades five through eight, has been piloted and evaluated with tremendously positive results; leading to an endorsement by UNESCO. Part one is called Cultural Journeys and has a “looking inwards” focus, and part two, called Cultural Ambassadors, has an “outward looking” focus.

ICAP has been designed in accordance with AusVELs and the new national Australian Curriculum, and is informed throughout by eight principles: Self-Awareness, Independent Thought, Belonging, Inspiration, Vision, Initiation, Leadership and Reflection. In an international context, the new Australian Curriculum is pioneering in its inclusion of Intercultural Understanding as a general capability.

The course employs techniques from civics, art and drama, combined with guided intercultural interactions, to help students develop intercultural abilities. Participants learn communication skills that build inclusive behaviours. As the course progresses, children become cultural ambassadors and practice explaining and promoting the benefits of cultural diversity and the practices of intercultural dialogue and celebration.

Context

Over the last century the cultural identity of many countries has become more diverse; and the diversity is increasing at an accelerating rate. Our home country, Australia, is amongst the world’s most culturally diverse nations; regarded as a successful multicultural society. Our next challenge is to become an interculturally skilled society. This challenge has emerged at a time when the need to foster mutual understanding across cultures and a sense of belonging and inclusiveness, especially among young people, has never been greater. To do this we must encourage and empower our youth to take advantage of the good will and opportunities that emerge from deeper knowledge and acceptance of each other’s cultures as well as tackling the problems of racism and discrimination.

Research from the Scanlon Foundation, a charity focused on fostering social cohesion, suggests that social cohesion can be understood in terms of the following elements: Sense of Belonging, Social Justice, Equity, Participation, Acceptance and Worth. Intercultural skills represent the application of fundamental social skills such as self-awareness and empathy, feelings of belonging and worth, and values such as respect, acceptance and tolerance in diverse cultural contexts. They contribute significantly to social cohesion.

Intercultural sensitivity and competence not only contribute to social cohesion, they underpin a sense of global citizenship and can open up new business opportunities. An education that reflects this will allow younger generations to make an effective contribution in an increasingly globalised world.

Calls from Australia’s leading educators and refugee support services have led the national educational system to address the need for a more culturally and globally sensitive curriculum that meets these needs. Intercultural understanding is now a general capability of the National Australian Curriculum. The next challenge is to scale-up teaching that is engaging and achieves measurable behavioural changes and this is where ICAP is ready to play a leading role.