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Title

Missing friendships : understanding the absent relationships of local and international students at an Australian university / Lara McKenzie ; Loretta Baldassar

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Abstract

In recent years, research on higher education has increasingly examined the realities of internationalisation, with a particular focus on international students' experiences and internationalisation at home programs. These studies have explored the friendships of international students, including their relationships with both locals and internationals from other countries. However, local students' perspectives and experiences of friendship are largely absent from this literature. The few accounts examining local students' lives explicitly focus on improving their cross-cultural knowledge and engagement, or on rare cases of local–international student friendships. The overriding assumption in this literature is that the understandings and social practises of local students are major barriers to their relationships with internationals. This paper addresses this gap by exploring local students' perspectives on the absence of friendships with their international peers. We utilise findings from a research project on internationalisation at home, involving interviews and

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focus groups with local and international students and staff at an Australian university. Focusing on locals' discussions of potential friendships with internationals, we propose that these missing friendships are an important area of study. We find that these friendships are missing for several interrelated reasons: local–international friendships are considered unnecessary and are therefore unimagined by locals, who tend to assume that similarity and affinity naturally lead to friendships, and the structures and spaces that might facilitate friendships are absent. Ultimately, uncovering why these friendships are missing sheds fuller light on how relationships might be facilitated, potentially informing and improving universities' internationalisation initiatives. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)

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