**Discussions: Making sense of your Findings**

* Research Project: *An investigation of international students’ experience of studying abroad.*
* Research Questions:
* *What do students feel to be the main challenges of studying abroad?*
* *To what extent do these challenges change over time?*
* *To what extent do students value the experience of studying abroad?*

**Task 1: Reviewing your Findings**

* In groups, highlight the most significant data from the findings below.
* Link these findings to the Research Questions above.
* What observations / conclusions do these findings suggest?

Make notes in the box below.

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(Survey of 157 International students at Greendale Community College)

Fig. 1.

Fig. 2.

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

**Task 2: Putting your findings in context.**

* Quickly skim the following 3 extracts from secondary sources.
* Pick out some key data / main observations from these sources.
* Link these back to the Research Questions. What kinds of conclusions do the sources give?
* Make notes in the box below.

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**Source A**

*Most international students reported feeling isolated and lonely at the beginning of their studies as they found it hard to adjust to a different language and style of studying. 63% of the respondents said that not having anyone to speak to in their mother tongue made studying abroad harder. After the first term though 56% of participants agreed that as their language skills improved they found it easier to make friends and their studies became easier. They recommended students avoided speaking their first language, even though it was hard at first.*

Cameron, S. (2013) International Students at an Australian University *International Education* 20(3): 72-75

**Source B**

*In a study of 350 respondents who had studied at a UK university, 230 agreed their experience was worthwhile. The main reasons given were to help with finding a job after graduation, to improve language skills and to experience a different culture. 75 felt the experience was negative as they felt reality did not match their expectations at all. Just over half (180) would recommend studying abroad to friends.*

Hall, J (2015) Is international study worthwhile? *Educational Review* 51(3): 102-110

Studying aboard is often represented as purely positive experience. This means students are often not prepared for any drawbacks which may affect their overall perception of the experience. In a study of 2500 students for 24 different countries at 3 UK universities, 75% said they were unprepared for the different teaching style and studying in a foreign language with 80% agreeing they suffered from culture shock which affected their academic performance. It seems much more needs to be done to support international students at the beginning of their studies.

O’Donnell, K. (2014) Is abroad always better? *Journal of International Education* 54(2): 121-124

**Source C**

A large scale study at a UK university has found that an extended and specially focused induction programme for international students decreased levels of culture shock by 50% and improved academic performance by 32%. Students who followed the enhanced induction were twice as likely to recommend studying abroad to friends and three times more likely to describe their experience as positive than those who did not. The enhanced induction covered areas suggested by previous students and provided extended study skills and language support. The findings suggest students’ experience is related to the quality of induction and support they receive.

Clarke, T. (2012) Can enhanced induction make a difference? *Review of Educational Practice* 62(5):105-110

**Task 3: Making connections**

* Using your notes for Task 1 and Task 2, highlight some connections between the *Research Findings* and the *observations / data* offered within the *Source Material*.
* How do the sources support the findings?
* Where do the findings differ from the source material?
* How do these connections provide answers to the Research Questions?

Make notes in the box below.

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**Task 4: Structuring your Discussion**

Now, put everything together in a logical and engaging order.

Here is a suggested structure:

* **Introduction:**
* Outline the main aim of the Research Project.
* Highlight the main observations within the source material.
* Link these to the Research Questions (generally).
* **Main Paragraph(s):**
* Discuss each Research Question in order.
* For each R.Q., show how the Findings and source material combine to produce a possible answer (or not!).
* Focus on the main similarities and differences between the findings and source material for each R.Q.
* Importantly, provide some suggestions for these results, especially where the findings differ from the source material.
* Provide a single-sentence mini-conclusion for each R.Q. highlighting the general answer (or lack thereof) provided by the findings.
* **Conclusion**
* Restate the aim of the Research Project
* Restate the general answers to each Research Question and your explanations for each.
* Reflect on the differences / similarities to the source material.
* Reflect on the results. What do they tell us? Why is this useful? How could these results affect future behaviour?
* Finally, think about what is missing. What DON’T the results tell us? What do we still need to learn? How could future projects build on this research?

In pairs / groups, use your notes and the suggested structure to write a draft discussion for this Research Project.

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