

Social Integration of International Students: encouraging the formation of friendships with local students in the mainstream secondary school context

Kay McNamara
ESL and International Student Program (ISP)
Kelvin Grove State College
Brisbane, Australia
Email:kmcna15@eq.edu.au

Izabela Skorka
ESL and International Student Program (ISP)
Kelvin Grove State College
Brisbane, Australia
Email: iskor1@eq.edu.au

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to share the practical ways in which teachers at Kelvin Grove State College (Qld) have attempted to improve contact between international and local students using the award winning Teaching Emphases for English Proficiency Levels (TEEPL) http://www.kelvingrovesc.eq.edu.au/asp/teepl/teepl_cover.asp (presented at ISANA conference 2005). TEEPL is a comprehensive database of suggestions to support students both academically and socially at the various stages of their development as outlined in the NLLIA ESL Bandscales (McKay, Hudson & Sapuppo, 1994) In addressing the issue of poor rates of interaction between local and international students at KGSC, ESL staff drew on suggestions in the TEEPL database to develop workshops designed to increase the quantity and quality of contact between domestic and international students. Weekly workshops conducted over two terms, were supplemented with between workshop activities (BWA's) involving practice of skills learnt with an expectation to feed back in the ensuing workshop.

Keywords

Social, Success, Interaction, Strategies, ESL

Introduction

The international student experience is often diminished by the lack of integration with domestic students. A New Zealand study by Professor Colleen Ward (2005), showed that poor integration in tertiary contexts links to poor language skills and possibly the development of large marginalised ghettos whereas, more frequent and more satisfying contacts with local students, leads to better adjustment and an increased chance of student success.

The issue of poor rates of interaction between local and international students at Kelvin Grove State College (KGSC) was initially raised via a) year 12 local students who labelled one area of the school 'Chinatown' because it was almost exclusively frequented by Chinese students during lunch times and b) several mainstream teachers who expressed concern that some of their ESL & ISP students were not making friends with local students. In response, a survey was designed for the students in order to highlight any gaps between expectations prior to arrival and actual experiences. From informal discussions, the ESL teachers suspected that student frequency of informal contact with local students was lower than what they expected before coming to Australia. Some said they never connect with locals even though they want to.

A series of workshops aimed at making connections with local students were offered to international and ESL students based on their Bandscale level (i.e., lower level students in listening and speaking), year level and desire to be involved. Course enrolment was ultimately on a voluntary basis with rewards in place to encourage participation e.g., special workshops, gift vouchers, funded social outings etc.

At the end of the course a second survey will be issued to determine the level of efficacy.

This paper will be of interest to anyone involved in helping international students meet the social and academic demands of mainstream secondary school life.

Context

Kelvin Grove State College is situated in an educational precinct comprising the Prep, Junior Primary, Middle and Senior Schools as well as the Queensland University of Technology (QUT). The college is a distinctive educational community characterised by quality academic learning, schools of excellence, extension courses and seamless transitions from Kindergarten to Year 12 and beyond to tertiary institutions. The staff at the College is committed to achieving quality educational and social outcomes for ESL and ISP students which number 112 (79 ISP and 33 ESL) from years 6 to 12, accounting for around 8% of the total student body of about 1330 students.

Each student within the ISP and ESL cohort can be seen to sit on a continuum in terms of their desire to interact with local students. This willingness to make friends is complex but seems partly dependent on factors such as home cultural norms, intended length of stay in Australia and future intent.

Table 1. Participating Students' profiles

Student Category and year level	Country of origin and language	Bandscale levels in listening/speaking	Visa expiry	Intention for future
ESL yr11	Mexico-Spanish	5/5	permanent	Permanent residency
ESL yr10	Zimbabwe-Shona	6/5	2011	Permanent residency
ISP yr 11	China-Mandarin	5/5	End 2008	unsure
ISP yr 11	China-Mandarin	5/5	End 2008	unsure
ISP yr11	Japan-Japanese	4/4	End 2008	unsure
ISP yr 12 in 2006 now in 1 st year uni.	China-Mandarin	7 / 7		Permanent residency

Background Issues

- The vast majority of students in need of help in forming friendships come from China and did not elect to take the course. Considering Hofstede's (1997) dimensions of cultural variability, Chinese collectivism traditionally removes the need to rely on friendships as a source of support. In individualistic societies, people will belong to more groups (family, religion, professions, friendships) and because of the larger number of group memberships, the less influence each group has on the individual's behaviour (Gudykunst 2003). Members of collectivist cultures, on the other hand, will belong to fewer groups (work, universities, family) and these groups will significantly influence their behaviour across situations. In this sense, many Chinese may view forming friendships with local students as unimportant or even undesirable. In fact one student confided that some Chinese tend to ostracise those who mix too much with local students.
- Friendships are important for general health and wellbeing and a strong source of support especially with the loss of family ties which often characterises the international student experience
- Some ISP students' parents tend to prioritise learning English above all else. The loss of family ties experienced as a result of this single-minded pursuit of English as a much coveted prize, can be

resented by the student who then subconsciously balks at the idea of making connections with local students for this end. Learning English requires motivation but when the goal is viewed as the cause of family disunity or even loss of identity, making connections with English speakers becomes problematic.

- English Listening and Speaking proficiency and certain cultural norms can inhibit the formation of friendships
- Opportunities throughout the school day for ISP and ESL students to socialise with local students are limited and therefore need to be formally structured

Links to Curriculum

Health and Physical Education

National: Mindmatters Program from the Curriculum Corporation (a partnership of all Australian Education Ministers). <http://cms.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters>

School Based: Health and Wellbeing (HWB)- a specific Year 10 subject as part of a whole college approach to health aimed at developing and enhancing student resilience and emotional intelligence e.g., through making connections with others

Links to College Values

The qualities of a good friend match the KGSC Values of Respect, Responsibility, Integrity and Honesty, Valuing Diversity, Courage and Resilience, Creative and Critical Thinking. These values shape the KGSC culture of trusting relationships allowing all members of the college to build a productive community where happiness is valued

TEEPL Database search results

Teaching Emphases to encourage making friends with domestic students

From: TEEPL Secondary Speaking

1-2 Teaching Emphasis: Teach language needed to form friendships e.g., show how to initiate and maintain a conversation by

- a) giving and receiving a compliment "I like your picture" with a follow up question "How did you do that?"
- b) enquiring/showing interest "What sport do you like?"
- c) making suggestions/inviting "How about...?"
- d) offering to share/help "Would you like...?"
- e) encouraging "You're doing well-keep it up."
- f) asking to join in "Is it OK if I join in?"

and emphasise the importance of appropriate body language (e.g., happy face and open arms versus angry face and folded arms), tone of voice, stress and intonation in delivery of these utterances (try saying 'thankyou' as if feeling angry, bored and then genuinely grateful)

Hyperlink: Healthwise Health Literacy Teaching Resource for upper primary Unit 4 Making Friends and Connections p57 - word document

2-3 Teaching Emphasis: Encourage student to join school sporting teams as a way of forming friendships with other students

2-3 Teaching Emphasis: Create contexts in which to model linguistic features of routine exchanges e.g., when playing card games and board games – invitations: 'would you ...'; acceptances: 'yes, I would ...'; refusals: 'no thankyou, I won't...'; apologies: 'I'm sorry ...'; co-ordinators: 'this and that', 'this but not that', 'this or that'; contractions: 'she's first', 'that's right', 'don't stop', 'I'm next'; subject pronouns: 'I have...', 'you can...', 'he said...', 'she finished...', 'it fell...', 'we won...', 'you played...', 'they went...'; possessive adjectives: 'my turn', 'her go', 'our cards'; adverbs of place: 'it's here', 'he's there'; adverbs of time: 'we did this yesterday', 'he's first today', 'I'll do it tomorrow', '...then she has a turn', '...after you'

2-3 Teaching Emphasis: Extend vocabulary and questioning skills through group activities such as a) Find someone who... i.e., allocate a target statement/question which requires maximum use of oral language to student who moves around the group questioning other students e.g., find someone who-has certain

autobiographical elements e.g., a birthday in October or 2 siblings or an award for something etc; has the other half of a dialogue or the opposites for a given list of words; can name the capital of Egypt etc

3-4 Teaching Emphasis: Pair student with familiar, supportive peer and have them interview each other on autobiographical information or on a simple recount of significant event in their life, using short prepared questions, then retelling partner's information to a group wherein the original speaker listens for accuracy and makes corrections if necessary (give student permission to 'pass' on any question, to avoid disclosure of sensitive information)

4-5 Teaching Emphasis: Keep the ratio of ESL enrolments to native speaking enrolments at a level which is conducive to the development of friendships and interactions with local students and the maintenance of positive attitudes amongst both staff and students (at a 9% ratio there is more ESL->native speaker interaction and positive attitudes whereas at 12-14% there is little interaction and problems arise amongst staff and students with some students rarely, if ever interacting with native speakers)

Hyperlink: research into Social Integration of International Students by Professor Colleen Ward- Centre for Cross-Cultural Research, NZ, notes from Isana Conference 2005- word document

4-5 Teaching Emphasis: Tape a 5-10 minute video sequence showing two people involved in a dialogue for students to watch with sound track off e.g., a job interview, a journalistic interview or a chat show and systematically draw student's attention to elements they may respond to e.g., a) setting (background- place, clothing; situation- what is happening; participants- friends, colleagues, age, profession) and b) interaction (proxemics- distance between participants; posture- closed/open; gestures- arm, hand, head movements; facial expressions- mouth, eyes, eyebrows, muscular tension; eye contact- contact, gaze length and direction) and the combinations of these which can be interpreted as conveying three layers of information i.e., 1) affective- attitudes as conveyed by facial expression etc 2) textual- structure of discourse and message, with accompanying body language and 3) interactive- turn-taking, eye contact etc and then pair students to view the first three minutes with the sound off, each student taking on the role of one of the participants in the video, and by watching that person's movements, gestures and facial expressions etc, attempting to predict the language being used before replaying the video with sound track on to compare with students' predictions and extending by playing the remainder of the video for students to imitate and mirror gestures and facial expressions accompanying the speech

5-6 Teaching Emphasis: Incorporate into the school calendar, activities which promote goodwill and friendship between ESL students and local students thus bridging social distance and promoting spoken language development e.g., Harmony Day, Multi-Cultural Fiesta and a range of interest groups such as sailing, yoga, belly dancing etc sharing testimonials and awarding certificates of participation as well as awards for exemplary volunteering

Hyperlink: East-West initiative at QUT Maria Victoria McCarthy mv.mccarthy@qut.edu.au -sheets of power point

5-6 Teaching Emphasis: Create contexts within unit of work for interviews using face to face interviews, or role-playing radio and TV interviews e.g., student interviews character from novel/subject of biography: exchanging greetings, opening topic - 'could you tell us about...?', clarifying, repeating, paraphrasing, giving feedback - 'uhuh', expressing opinion 'I thought that you could have ...', substantiating arguments - 'There's evidence to show that', maintaining eye contact, maintaining cohesion - new information in answer is made theme of next question; using ellipsis - repeating only part of the question in the response

3-4-5-6-7 Teaching Emphasis: Demystify effective group work practices related to conversation rules, leadership styles, social relationships, conformity etc considering culture-specific norms the student may bring which regulate their behaviour in the group and may be misinterpreted as non-engagement due to an unwillingness to participate (e.g., for Chinese students the concepts of guanxi- obligation to others and face saving by avoidance of embarrassment to others mean that a general preference for group harmony may prevent any disagreement with peers thus limiting their participation in the group and often leading to misguided stereotypical views of the 'silent Asian'; for Sudanese students, the need to feel connected by friendship links with group members as a context in which they can take risks is such that without knowing the other group members well, they are reluctant to join in) and monitor group processes by running sharing and reflection sessions after group work and setting goals for improvement particularly when student expresses frustration/anger due to comparisons made between themselves and English speaking peers which highlight their lack of English knowledge and skills

4-5-6 Teaching Emphasis: Offer yoga classes in which student can interact in a non-threatening environment with native speakers e.g., 1 hour per week for a 4 week course before school starting in a circle to express how they are feeling that day, followed by gentle stretches including partner work where student is paired with a

native speaker to build trust and ending back in the circle with a positive comment to help them through their current challenges

4-5-6 Teaching Emphasis: Incorporate into the school calendar, activities which promote goodwill and friendship between ESL students and local students thus bridging social distance and promoting spoken language development e.g., Harmony Day, Multi-Cultural Fiesta and a range of interest groups such as sailing, yoga, belly dancing etc sharing testimonials and awarding certificates of participation as well as awards for exemplary volunteering

6-7 Teaching Emphasis: Draw attention to sociocultural cues in the Australian context which help to infer intent as in humorous intent – explain that Australian friendship/mateship can be based on irony and banter e.g., the tenor of ‘you’re a rough old sod’ is such that the harsher the literal meaning, the more affection/fun it can potentially communicate

6-7 Teaching Emphasis: Encourage fluency by a) engaging student in conversation on unfamiliar topics; b) organizing listen/read and retell activities – each group member is responsible for retelling part of a text with a clear schematic structure – narrative: recount/news report/biography or non-narrative: review/argument/procedure c) setting up impromptu talks with a minimum time requirement to encourage elaboration, using high interest topic cards and deducting points for inappropriate silences or filled pauses e.g., ‘um’, ‘you know’, ‘like’

Activities

A: Core group of ESL and ISP participants

- Complete initial qualitative data collection survey
- Interview past student now in first year of university who was highly successful in making friends with local students whilst in years 11 and 12
- Brainstorm, discuss, role play and complete worksheet on- ways to make friends and the use of appropriate body language as well as tone of voice
- Play board game- high interest topic cards using open ended questions to encourage self expression as a means of opening up and thus making connections
- Complete final data collection survey to gauge efficacy of course

B: Wider group including 5 volunteer local Year 10 HWB students as buddies for core participants

- Complete an interview sheet in pairs-ISP and ESL students partner with local students to find out what they have in common then discuss what makes it easier/harder to approach a new person
- Play board game- high interest topic cards using open ended questions to encourage self expression as a means of opening up and thus making connections
- Go out to a local café for structured conversational activities in which each ESL/ISP student interacts with each local student - exchange contact details if desired and set up a group on facebook website www.facebook.com designed to keep friends in touch

C: Wider group including whole class of Year 10 HWB students

- Participate in "Making Connections" workshop including partner yoga, guided meditation and sharing of experiences, massage, chanting and story telling

Future Directions

- Professional development for staff working with socially at-risk ESL and ISP students as part of the larger TEEPL PD package offered each year to whole staff
- 2007 pilot to be refined, formally embedded in Health and Wellbeing Subject and offered on a wider scale in 2008
- Build program into new ESL/ISP enrolment process

Conclusion

This initiative is an example of one school's response to a key challenge associated with student success in international education. Student success is a multi-dimensional and highly complex phenomenon dependent on a range of variables associated with motivation and intercultural communication competence. Some students actively seek out social support in the form of links with local students whereas others deliberately limit such contacts. The 5 participants in this pilot understand that the process of becoming a competent intercultural communicator using English as a Second Language is a personal journey through continual interaction and the unwavering desire to seek out an understanding of cultures other than one's own. It is hoped that through this type of program, the wider cohort of 112 students will also realise such understandings.

References

Books

2007 ISANA International Conference "Student success in international education", 27-30 November, Stamford Grand, Glenelg, Adelaide, Australia

Gudykunst, W. B. (Ed.). (2003). *Cross-cultural and intercultural communication*. California: SAGE Publications.

Hofstede, G. (1997). *Cultures and organisations: Software of the mind* (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill

McKay, P., Hudson, C. and Sapuppo, M. (1993). *ESL Development: Language and Literacy in Schools Project, Volume 1: Teachers' Manual, Project overview, NLLIA ESL Bandscales and Materials*. DEST, Canberra.

Zacich, R. (2006). *The Ungame* Michigan: Talicor Inc.

Articles

Ward, C. (2005) *Research into Social Integration of International Students in Tertiary Contexts* Plenary Session-16th ISANA International Education Conference Christchurch New Zealand