

Is Mixing with Your Kiwi Mates Enough to Learn a Language?

http://english.unitecology.ac.nz/esolonline/teachers/prof_read/dwight_eriksen/home_e.php

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ABSTRACT

We were concerned about the social integration and language acquisition of the ESOL students at our school. We thought there would be a positive correlation between these two factors. Our perception was that those who succeed in integrating tend to make greater gains in their English competence than those who don't. However, we discovered other factors had a greater effect on English language development. We found that performance on the Rubin/Thompson scale (1994) was a better indicator of language learning than social integration.

BACKGROUND

This research has been prompted by our concern that many of the ESOL students at school spend much of their time clustered as a group, and struggle to integrate with the rest of the student body. Their isolation is further entrenched out of school, when either through a choice of their own, or as a result of circumstances, they spend time alone or with their fellow international students. Many spend hours on the internet or the telephone, conversing only in their home language. During the weekends, it is not uncommon for these students to travel to Auckland - again to socialise with their L1 peers.

There are others however, who do succeed in becoming absorbed into the Kiwi way of life. They participate fully in the classroom in a very interactive way, take part in sport and become fully fledged family members in their home-stays.

Although it is understandable to associate with one's L1 peers, it does interest and concern us as to what extent this negatively impacts on the students' ability to improve their English. Our perception is that those who succeed in integrating, tend to make greater gains in their English competence than those who don't.

The bulk of the students originate from China and Japan although others hail from Cambodia, Thailand, Korea, Taiwan, Mexico, Germany and France. Their language abilities vary from Elementary to Upper Intermediate and some of the latter grouping are attempting to earn their IELTS qualification. Most are fee paying and stay in the home-stays provided by the school. All are mainstreamed and receive one hour of ESOL tuition each school day, although some are now spending three hours a day exclusively learning English with Kiwi at Thames, a joint project between Thames High School and Kiwi English Language School.

As well as observing the social integration of these selected students, we read various articles to see what factors other researchers had identified. We considered different

characteristics formulated by other researchers, and discovered strategies mentioned by Rubin and Thompson in 1983, to which we made constant reference.

INTRODUCTION

Keeping hold of our focus on social integration, we surveyed the literature trying to keep our minds open. We came across Rubin and Thompson's (1994) definition of the characteristics of a "good" language learner. They suggest that a good language learner:

- is a willing and accurate guesser;
- has a strong drive to be communicative and to get his/her message across;
- is not inhibited and is willing to make mistakes in order to learn to communicate;
- is prepared to focus on language form as well as meaning and to look constantly for patterns in the language;
- practises as frequently as possible;
- monitors his own speech as well as others, focusing on how well he is performing, and how his/her performance is being perceived.

We decided eventually to use these strategies as guidelines to measure the effectiveness of language learning of students, regardless of their social integration. It was by doing this that we realised that however well a student operates within a social environment, language development does not automatically take place. We found that performance on the Rubin/Thompson scale was a better indicator of language learning than social integration.

METHOD/DATA COLLECTION

1. We designed both student and home-stay questionnaires formulated to focus on the amount of time students spend on various activities both at home and at school. As well as this, we had personal interviews with both the international students, and with staff and home-stay parents.

Considerable time was taken to first establish a rapport with the interviewees so that they would feel confident to express their true feelings, and dispense with responses which they may consider polite or politically correct, but which may not in fact be accurate. It was helpful that we were teaching these students and therefore spent hours with them in the classroom, being able to observe their reactions and note their comments.

2. One student was selected and observed in detail for the duration of a school day in order to gain an understanding of how much she interacted and communicated in English in different classes, with different teachers and differing fellow students.
3. In addition student records and classroom performance were analysed.

We endeavoured to take as broad a student sample (see Appendix I) as possible.

CASE STUDIES

1. A - Spanish

Background

A is a sixteen year old exchange student from a Spanish speaking country. He has been at the high school for one term. His personality is very warm and friendly and outgoing- and he always loved to party and was very social. He has one brother who is fourteen. His father is a journalist and writer and the boss of a magazine and his mother is a sociologist. A plays the bassoon and played in an orchestra for two years. He went to a Music academy and learnt singing and bassoon. A has travelled widely in Europe and has stayed in several European home-stays.

Social Integration

A is a people's person. In the short time that he was at the school he quickly established himself as the live wire of the school and the class. He was always willing to give anything a go. He became a member of the gym and also played rugby (even though he had never tried it before.) In one term, his weight gain was 10 kgs. He grabbed opportunities to fly in a helicopter, sky dive, surf, and joined tours around parts of New Zealand. He regularly went surfing with friends.

At school, he always had friends around him. He enjoyed the ESOL class because there were more opportunities for talk and practising the language. Drama was also a favourite. One memorable occasion was when he shocked his more conservative ESOL classmates by arriving from the drama class dressed as a woman. Most of his friends came from his drama class. Other subjects included history, French and Practical English. He did record a number of unexplained absences and this too might have been an indicator of his success at social integration.

Although at home he tended to be a little lazy and there were a few conflicts about his use of the internet and the eating of too much food, he was accepted as part of the home and family. His home-stay parents were a newly married couple, who, although very good to him, could not facilitate social interaction with peers as other home-stays who had teenagers, could.

"Good" Language Learner?

He started to learn English about four years ago with a heavy grammar and vocabulary building focus. He is very motivated to learn English as he realises that "English is an important language for Internet and generally". His main aim in coming here was to improve his English. He noted that the "British accent is a lot easier to understand than Kiwi." His main aim was to improve English. He felt that he has improved a bit, but needs to improve a lot more. He was fearless in asking questions and used to joke and laugh when his mistakes had funny double meanings. He regularly would ask questions and check his pronunciation and grammar. Shortly after arrival he borrowed an English grammar book and even bought another which he used as a reference throughout his stay. In addition he completed a two week English

orientation course with the Kiwi English Language School. Besides using an English dictionary he also possessed a bilingual Spanish one.

Further Comment

Even though it is natural for A to talk and interact with his peers, he noted that the first week at school was the most difficult. He stated that to learn a language "you have to stay in a place and live the language."

He felt that at home he did not enjoy doing the house chores but agreed it was an opportunity to interact and speak English. He noted that together they watched a fair amount of TV and it was valuable to discuss what they saw during and after viewing. He would have preferred to have been part of a home that had other teenagers and pointed out that his fellow compatriot lived in such a home and had far more such opportunities to make friends.

He felt that the three months spent at the school was a valuable one and that "his confidence had improved and could express himself a lot better".

2. O- Asian

Background

O from Asia, has been living in New Zealand for four years now. She spent her first year in another town living in a hostel and was enrolled at a high school there. During her time at our school she lived with three different home-stays. She is an only child. She has a cousin in Australia who is fluent in English and has a great deal of personal confidence. O sees her cousin as a role model and was her motivation to come to school in New Zealand. She quite often used to travel home to Asia. Her independence is quite a strong characteristic and remarked that each time she returned home her mother would comment how more westernised she had become. By the time she had left New Zealand, she had passed her country's university entrance exam and had enrolled to study a degree in tourism.

Social Integration

O's social integration patterns changed depending on her social environment and the differences could be clearly seen each time she moved to a new home-stay. In her first year in NZ, she shared a dormitory with six other kiwi girls. This she felt was hugely beneficial and her language development was strong.

She has stayed in three different home-stays. Her first home-stay had little children and there was limited interaction. In her second home-stay she was with an elderly couple and she spent most of her time closeted in her room - watching TV and playing on the computer. She came out for meals and did not mix much. In her third home-stay she shares a room with another Asian girl.

At school, O now mixes socially with some Kiwi girls, and with other female Asian students. The girls who she mixes with are shy and tend to avoid contact with boys. During whanau (form class) time, O chats freely with the girls sitting around her. She

is still too shy to go into the seventh form common-room. However, she will sit outside it in the sun and converse with others. O further undertook to be a book monitor for whanau reading.

"Good" Language Learner?

O started to learn English when she was six, and learnt English nursery rhymes and alphabet songs. She tended to be shy and not ask too many questions, but this improved towards the end of her stay.

She felt her conversational English improved when she had a teenage home-stay sister. Talking while watching television and while eating was also a help. Being friendly and being present during whanau time is also a big help. Her academic English was boosted by her enrolling for extra language tuition after school at a local English Language Academy.

She scored 5.5 / 6 for her IELTS preliminary examination. She speaks fluently and confidently in English now.

Further Comment

There were a number of activities which helped her socially to integrate at home.

Babysitting for another family who had two responsible primary school aged children helped O to develop confidence. Having a teenage home-stay sibling seemed to make an enormous difference to O's social development and adjustment to the New Zealand way of life. By the time she left she was much more extrovert and appeared to be much happier at school. She started to gain self-confidence and maturity and moved into a more motivated peer group of girls.

Things that she felt helped her socially integrate at school:

- buddy reading;
- the quiet friendship from other girls;
- quiet encouragement and support and providing easy reading material and asking her questions about it helped her academic English;
- paired work;
- treating her as an adult who is expected to participate.

3. Y - ASIAN

Background

Y is 16 years old has come from Asia to stay in New Zealand for a year. Her objective is more to experience the Kiwi way of life, rather than to master English and gain academic credits. She seems to cope with most of her subjects, particularly mathematics but it is her choice not to enter any external examinations.

Social integration

She is lucky to stay with a very hospitable family who takes her on many outings. She is also fortunate to have a home-stay family member who is at school with her and is a little younger than her. She is given a number of responsibilities at home and does the dishes and cleans up after meals. In fact she has said that the times that she speaks most is after dinner while she carries out these responsibilities.

She has not participated in any of the extra-mural activities that the school has offered. She plays no sport and has not joined in the musical opportunities that are afforded by THS, even though she is able to play the piano.

Good Language Learner?

Y has been learning English for four years. She learnt this language through the traditional way of plenty of grammar and rote learning. It is a rare occurrence for Y to spontaneously utter a comment in English. This might indicate that she is not thinking in English. When at school she does tend to gravitate towards the other Asian students, so she probably picks up her conversational skills at her home-stay. Y has a great knowledge of grammar and is able to dissect words into parts and deduce meanings as result. She always has her electronic dictionary with her to which she makes constant reference. She is reluctant to participate in interactive games and appears not to accept the communicative approach in learning a language, preferring grammar and written rules.

Further Comment

Y has only applied the '6 Golden Rules of Language Learning' in the reading and writing. Perhaps she is shy, but avoids making mistakes, asking for possible correction and having the strong drive to communicate.

4. S - CHIENES

Background

S is a nineteen year student from China who is academically gifted and works incredibly hard. In the year that he has lived in New Zealand he has stayed in two different kinds of home-stays. These will be compared. Recently he was placed fourth in New Zealand for a maths competition.

Social integration

S is a friendly and polite student who generally gets on well with those around him. He has stayed in two home-stays this year and each can be contrasted markedly.

First home-stay:

The home-stay family consisted entirely of a single woman who also had a partner who stayed sometimes. S was socially withdrawn, spending nearly all of his time in his room, studying.

He was invited to parties but to him, it was "a waste of time. Drinking beer and dancing is not important". He said that, in this house, there was no need to talk because of the age difference. He said that, with people of a similar age to himself, he could have talked. S had very few, if any, family responsibilities.

Second home-stay:

He moved into a home with a part-Maori mother with traditional values, and a teenage son and daughter. S is sharing a room with the teenage son. S is fast developing the manners and attitudes of a Kiwi teenager. He mixes socially a lot more now. He has progressively become better socially integrated partly because of the second home-stay, and partly because of his achievements as goalie in the school's 1st XI soccer team. However, his English appears to have reached a plateau, and he still speaks Chinese a great deal with his fellow international students.

He said "I talk English three or four times more than I used to. I feel that my English has improved". S says that he has more responsibilities around the home, e.g. cooking and shopping, and he explains bursary biology to his home-stay brother. I asked him what he finds most difficult, and S answered

"I can understand reading and writing better than speaking (pronunciation). He understands better when things are written on the board for him to look at. I asked him "Where do you feel awkward?" and he replied "At formal functions". On top of this, he still visits his former home-stay socially.

At school S is not an extrovert but he does circulate and interact with other Kiwis. He certainly makes the effort to make contact. He plays goalie in the 1st XI soccer team and also joined the swimming club.

On a more personal level, S took it upon himself to act as mediator when a fellow Chinese student was undergoing a personal crisis and needed support.

"Good" language learner?

S has been learning English for ten years. At primary school, he learnt a lot of grammar and rote phrases and then started to read more during his secondary schooling. Referring to his language skills he said that he "prefers reading, as he can do it in his own time."

His reason to learn English is that he wants to become an engineer in China and that he feels that he will have more to offer if he can speak English as well. His motivation levels were reasonably high until he gained entrance to Canterbury University based on his high mathematical achievement instead of IELTS. Since that moment it seemed that he was not extending himself to further improve his academic English. However, both his conversational English and his confidence have improved, since moving into a home-stay with other Kiwi teenagers. This was in contrast to his first six months here where conversational English was a low priority as well as any social interaction."

S spent hours studying and preparing for the lessons the next day and would constantly use his electronic dictionary.

The main approach of the Advanced ESOL class was a "Communicative English" one. S would voice the opinion that much of the interactive strategies "were not serious learning and that we should be writing far more regular tests!"

S did not write his IELTS prelim exams like his fellow classmates and in his listening test, he failed dismally.

Further Comment

Things that help him socially integrate at home.

- First home-stay:
There was very little social integration, coupled with very few family responsibilities.
- Second home-stay:
S is part of the family, cooks and shops and shares a room. His family enjoy talking at length around the table.

Things that help him socially integrate at school

- Buddy reading has been a great support and the senior common room has also provided an opportunity to integrate.
- In one of his mathematics classes, S was forced to sit away from his Chinese peers, and to sit next to a highly intelligent and motivated Kiwi student. S was unhappy with this arrangement at first, as he was in the habit of doing all the work for his peers, to the detriment of their studying.

5. P - SOUTH EAST ASIAN

Background

P is a sixteen-year old south east Asian girl who is a recent immigrant and qualifies to be an ESOL student with MOE funding. She has lived in New Zealand for six months and functions at a lower intermediate level of English. It definitely was at a lower level at the beginning of the year. She lives with her family (who have limited spoken English) and the family own a bakery in town.

Social Integration

Within the home context, she works hard at the bakery, and spends an hour before school and a further three hours after school working in the shop. She works the whole of Saturday in the shop and only has time off on Sunday where she spends most of that time with her family-speaking L1. A fellow south east Asian seems to be the only visitor at the home.

At school, she tends to be very quiet and shy and is generally a fringe member of any group. She does mix with generally exclusively female groups and they are friendly to her but she remains quiet natured.

Things that help her socially integrate at school:

- buddy reading;
- the quiet friendship from other girls -the girls who she mixes with are shy and tend to avoid contact with boys.

"Good" Language Learner?

Her motivation levels are very high because she is keen to be a fully functioning Kiwi and her family are reliant on her for their business to survive.

Her conversational English is promoted through her shop experience, the international support programme with the seventh formers and friendships with other girls, even though that involves listening. Her academic English seems to be promoted through her keenness to learn and by the teachers who approach her individually and quietly and who encourage her discretely.

Further Comment

P tries her very best to learn as much as she can. Her natural shyness makes it hard for her to take the risks, asking for correction or reaching out to engage actively in communication. By nature she is very passive. She does not have that many chances to practise the language.

6. A (SCHOOL) DAY IN THE LIFE OF P

Morning Whanau (form class time)

P does not appear to know her whanau teacher's name. Neither does Y, an Asian student also in the same whanau. P sat alone at the front and listened quietly while the notices were being read. She made no contact with Kiwi students.

On the other hand, Y chatted to two girls in English, and this made me realise that the girls in that whanau are friendly and willing to make contact with students who don't yet speak English too well. Perhaps P is just too shy to try to talk in English just yet. She's only been in the country six months.

Period 1 ESOL Class of 5 Students Topic: Grammar (collective nouns)

There was a male relief teacher taking this class, while the usual teacher (myself) was present, observing P.

P listened and responded quietly in English to questions posed by the teacher.
9:05 P took out her paperback dictionary, which she consulted ten times during the lesson.

The teacher assisted her in English, and she responded briefly in English, once during the lesson.

The teacher talked to her and she nodded understanding, four times throughout the lesson.

P volunteered an English answer eight times during the lesson.

P asked the teacher a question once during the lesson.

9:20 P muttered "I'm not sure" to herself in English. This happened once during the lesson.

P spent the rest of the lesson writing out the answers on the worksheet, in English. *She did not interact with any other students during this lesson, but concentrated intently on trying to learn as much as she could.*

Period 2 Mathematics Class of Initially 8, Then 10 Students Topic: Compass Construction Work

There was a female teacher with an American accent.

Year 10 level mathematics, with students from Japan and Thailand, also present in the same class.

P said "Thank you" when a Kiwi student handed her a book.

P sat alert, interested, when the teacher taught from the board.

A Kiwi student called her "Vee" and sent the compasses along the desk to P.

9:51 P took out her paperback dictionary which she consulted three times during the lesson.

P wrote her own notes from the board.

P clearly understood the construction instructions given by the teacher, and she did the compass work step by step.

P was puzzled when it came to the bookwork, she searched the textbook quietly but did not ask for help. The Japanese student did exactly the same.

10:30 C in a wheelchair dropped his ruler on the floor and asked P to pick it up for him. She did so silently, he said "Thanks" and she blushed.

After perusing the textbook, P did the compass work quietly till the end of the lesson.

Again, P did not interact with other students throughout this lesson.

Morning Interval

9:45 P met first one, then two other female Kiwi students. She chatted with them while eating, outside in a sunny, sheltered spot in front of the hall.

9:48 P stood on the outside of the group as the other girls chatted.

9:50 The group of six other girls opened up to include P. All remained standing.

There were 16 girls altogether in front of the hall by this time, but no boys.

Then one boy joined the group next to P's.

P mainly listened to the other girls chatting, she did not say much.

Two more boys joined the other group.

Then one more boy left his bag in what is obviously regarded as a safe place to leave bags (next to me). Now there were three groups of six or seven each.

P's group still contained six girls.

P stood quietly, facing the group, and appeared to be a part of the group.

E and a girl with an EARS* badge did nearly all of the talking.

Note: This is a very safe part of the school grounds, right by the staffroom.

** **EARS** (Education and Resources from Students) is a programme where selected volunteer students are trained to listen to other students and then offer them information and options, including referring them to adults for counselling. The programme works very well because it has been found that some students tend to reveal problems to their peers more readily than to teachers or parents. The EARS students wear a badge on their school uniform to identify them to all other students.*

Period 3 English Class of 11 Students Topic: Filling in forms

There was a female teacher

The class included O, an older Asian girl.

The classroom was arranged with three large tables running lengthwise up and down the room.

Three girls sat at one table, P sat alone at the middle table, and a group of seven (3 girls and 4 boys) sat around the other table.

P easily followed the teacher's verbal instructions.

11:23 The teacher asked P "Do you understand?"

P nodded assent.

Then P asked the teacher a question.

11:24 to 11:27 The teacher explained the work individually to P.

11:28 P asked the teacher another question.

The teacher again helped P individually.

*Note: The class was chatty, with students helping each other. P felt comfortable asking for help. Some of the students were the same as in the mathematics class, where the students worked in silence, and P did **not** ask for help, even when she did not know what to do and was stuck. To me the fact that the students chatted, thereby not hearing and therefore covering any possible mistakes P might have made, is significant. Also the fact that the teacher offered P individual help in a non-threatening environment made it easier for P to ask for assistance.*

11:33 P took out her paperback dictionary, which she consulted seven times during the lesson.

Then P worked quietly, completing the form worksheet.

11:38 The teacher asked "Do you need help, P?"

P replied "No, I'm all right, thank you" and smiled.

11:39 to 11:42 The teacher helped P individually.

Then P continued to work quietly, alone.

11:58 to 12:00 The teacher helped P individually, and P responded in English.

12:03 The teacher helped P individually.

P continued to work quietly until the the end of the lesson.

Period 4 Biology Class of 12 Topic: Revising for Exam by Completing Workbook

There was a male teacher.

The class included P's male cousin, who is fluent in English and sat away from her.

P sat at the front, with other girls.

12:23 The teacher gave P a workbook, open at the correct page.

12:25 The teacher showed P the place on the page that he was referring to.

P wrote her answers into the workbook, from the board.

P's male cousin called out questions from the back of the lab.

P missed the verbal change of page number, and asked the girl beside her, who showed her the correct page.

P got lost again, and asked M across the table to find the correct page for her (P simply passed her workbook to M, who found the correct page, then passed the book back. No words were spoken).

There was another verbal change of page number. This time the teacher helped P to find the place.

12:45 The teacher explained to P that she was using an old workbook, so the pages were different.

12:50 The teacher went out of the room and got photocopies for P, then returned and explained them to her individually.

P sat quietly and studied the photocopied sheets.

The teacher announced that half of the exam would be a report, to be written in English.

The students worked in silence.

13:00 to 13:02 The teacher helped P individually.

P asked one question of the teacher, which he answered.

The teacher told the class that he is writing a biology essay tonight which he will photocopy and give to the students as a model of how to write a biology essay.

***Note:** International students need a paired buddy in each class to sit with them and talk to them in English, and to assist with verbal instructions.*

Lunchtime

13:15 P returned to the front of the hall, opposite the staffroom, to sit on the concrete and eat her lunch.

She sat with two other girls (Kiwi girls), but did not talk to them.

13:35 Two more Kiwi girls came and sat on the other side of P.

P still did not talk to them.

13:45 P then remained standing, facing the other girls in a group as if to talk to them, before going to the toilet.

Buddy reading* in the library

14:00 P took a book from the shelves and started to read it.

During the buddy reading award ceremony, P sat silent and interested, observing everything.

Her Kiwi buddy spoke to her briefly three times, and P nodded and smiled in response, without speaking.

**Buddy reading is part of a programme to raise literacy levels. Any students tested as being slower readers are paired with a better reader of roughly the same age and gender, who volunteer to read together (and have fun reading) books of a teenage-friendly nature. The buddy reading takes place in the library during afternoon whanau (form class) time, three days a week for twenty minutes, after lunch. The rest of the entire school engages in silent reading, in the whanau classes at this time.*

Period 5 Health Class of 19 Students Topic: When to Drink or Avoid Alcohol

There was a female teacher (who also taught P English during Period 3).

The class included Y, also an Asian student.

Y sat next to a Kiwi girl.

P chose to sit by herself.

14:35 Teacher moved P to sit in a group at the front, between a boy and a girl.

14:40 P talked briefly to the girl next to her.

The girl beside P then talked across P to the other girls sitting behind them.

P did the worksheet quietly.

14:45 to 14:47 The teacher helped P individually by asking further questions re the alcohol worksheet, to clarify it further.

P talked to teacher, smiling as she did so.

P asked the teacher why I chose her to be under observation all day.

The teacher replied that it is because of P's 100 per cent attendance.

Y talked frequently to the girl beside her.

15:02 P talked briefly and quietly to the girl beside her.

15:08 The girl and boy on either side of P were talking to each other across P.

15:10 The boy moved to sit by himself on the other side of the classroom.

The teacher came to talk to P and the girl beside her.

C told me that she talks to P sometimes during Physical Education.

P continued to work quietly on the worksheet.

15:18 P handed her completed worksheet to the teacher, as the teacher walked in front of Pamela's desk.

Teacher explained the word "individual" to P.

P remained quiet till the end of the lesson.

FINDINGS

We learned from compiling all of the data from the student interviews and observations that there were a number of helpful factors that the students identified and which we observed that seemed to facilitate better social integration. These pointers are listed below:

At home:

- talking while watching TV;
- teenage home stay siblings for building social circles;
- talking at mealtimes;
- being given responsibilities such as shopping, cooking;
- home-stay families who share their family lives and are not just motivated by the money;
- healthy family interaction and realising that families are a source of support.

At School

- being given responsibilities such as being a book monitor;
- use of the common room;
- playing in a sports team;
- having a Kiwi buddy/mentor/boy friend;
- discrete individual help from teachers;
- intensive English language training before entering mainstream classes;
- buddy reading;
- international Student Support Programme;
- effective orientation programme for the whole week.

In the classroom:

- group work;
- encouragement to use only English in class;
- sitting with a Kiwi buddy in class rather than with international students;
- sitting with students from other language groups in the ESOL class;
- teacher encouraging questions;
- teacher stressing that people learn from their mistakes;

- teacher giving out written model answers to assessments to international students;
- enforcement of normal school rules, with no extra allowances made for fee-paying students.

DISCUSSION

Having identified factors that assist with the social integration of the students, we then had to again ask ourselves the question: If social integration does take place, can it be assumed that language improvement will automatically follow?

Turning Point

As we were looking at the data regarding S, a most interesting revelation emerged. S was a student who integrated extremely well. He played goalie in the 1st XI soccer team, he mixed in the Year 13 common room, and, later in the year, moved to a homestay with other Year 13 siblings. In spite of this, his language ability plateaued. This puzzled us. It was only when we applied Rubin and Thompson's six characteristics of a good language learner that we realised that these have perhaps more relevance than social integration. It was then that we changed the focus of our research and sought to study these six characteristics in greater detail. To assist our analysis, we designed a **scoring system** and rated each of the students accordingly. (We later devised a report format (see #1 Report under the heading of CLASSROOM POSTER). The following student scores were ratified by other staff and senior students at the school:

	A	O	Y	S	P
Willing and accurate guesser	4	2	2	1	2
Strong drive to be communicative	5	3	3	2	2
Willing to make mistakes	4	3	2	1	2
Focuses on language form	3	3	3	2	3
Practises frequently	4	2	2	2	2
Monitors own performance	3	2	2	2	2
TOTAL	23	15	14	10	13
Average	3.8	3.5	2.3	1.6	2.2

Key: **1** **2** **3** **4** **5**
 Never **Seldom** **Sometimes** **Often** **Always**

These scores are more indicative of English language learning than all of the social criteria already measured. For example, S played soccer in a sports team, had New Zealand friends, and so on, yet his English has not progressed, in fact, since he gained entrance to Canterbury University on the strength of his exceptionally high

mathematics scores, without sitting the IELTS examination, his progress appears to have reached a plateau.

These results suggest that these 'characteristics' could well be used as a reporting method for ESOL students in their language learning feedback to agents and parents.

CLASSROOM POSTER

We found the six Rubin/Thompson characteristics to be critically important and therefore devised the following applications for our school:

1. Report

Name of student: _____

The following strategies have been identified by researchers Rubin and Thompson as being essential to becoming a "good" language learner.

Strategy	Score
Willing and accurate guesser	
Strong drive to be communicative	
Willing to make mistakes	
Focuses on language form	
Practices frequently	
Monitors own performance	
TOTAL	
Average	

Key: **1** **2** **3** **4** **5**
 Never **Seldom** **Sometimes** **Often** **Always**

2. Student Reflection Sheet

If I am doing all of these things then I will learn English faster.

What I need to help me learn English faster.		
Do I attempt to make guesses even when I am not sure it is correct?		
Do I try and make every effort to talk to others?		

Do I realise that making mistakes is the quickest way to learn to speak a language?		
Do I try use my English grammar rules?		
Do I constantly practise English?		
Do I correct myself and make sure that others understand me?		

3. Classroom Poster

If I am doing all of these things then I will learn English faster.

What I need to help me learn English faster.	
Do I make guesses?	
Do I try to talk to others?	
Can I get over it if I make a mistake?	

Do I try use my English grammar rules?	
Do I constantly practise English?	
Do I correct myself?	

4. Home-Stay Reflection Sheet

What I can do to help my home-stay student learn English faster.		
Do I encourage the students to express themselves even when they don't know all the words?		
Do we talk and laugh together at meal times, while watching TV and just around the house?		
Do I reassure them that people learn by making mistakes?		
Do I assist the student with any English grammar questions		

Do I treat them as a regular family members, sharing the normal household responsibilities thereby providing them with opportunities for extending their language competence?		
Do I encourage students to check themselves, how well they are communicating?		

CONCLUSION

Although we believe that the social integration of international students into New Zealand society is important, we have successfully shown that where students apply Rubin and Thompson's characteristics of a good language learner (1994), in a context of social integration, language learning is accelerated.

REFERENCES

Rubin, J., & Thompson, I. (1994). *How to be a more successful language learner* (2nd ed.). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Appendix I

Student Sample

	S	Y	A	O	P
Fee -Paying	#	#		#	
Exchange			#		
Permanent residence					#
Integration at home ?	More recently	#	#	#	
Integration at school ?	#		#		
Extra language tuition		Kiwi English		#	
Gender	male	female	male	female	female
Nationality	Chinese	Japanese	Spanish	Japanese	Cambodian