An Evaluation of an English Language Immersion Programme for ESL Preservice Teachers

Peter Hudson & Sue Hudson

School of Education
Southern Cross University
Military Road, Lismore
NSW 2480
Australia
phudson@scu.edu.au

Abstract

A six-week English Language Immersion Programme (ELIP) was conducted for 19 Hong Kong preservice ESL teachers at an Australian regional university. This programme focused on enhancing the students' English knowledge and skills, as well as providing pedagogical knowledge for teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) in the primary school context. Predominantly a quantitative study, two surveys, a pretest and posttest, were administered to determined confidence levels on English language proficiency. These results, and standardised test results, indicated that short-term English immersion programmes could develop English language proficiency and substantially enhance ESL teaching confidence. It concluded that valid and reliable assessments need to be continually developed as these can aid towards providing trustworthy accountability, certifiable accreditation, and a way to improve upon immersion programmes and practices.

The global need to learn English

The role of English in our global society is constantly evolving (Kitao, 1996; Collot, Belmore, 1996). Factors that have aided the global distribution of English include British colonisation, economics, travel, and popular culture (Harmer, 2001). Meethan (2001) claims that the relationship between tourism in the global society and the learning of English appears to be a significant factor contributing to the growth of English around the world. In addition, our global village has ethical and democratic challenges that can include media promotion aiming towards developing popular culture and a direction for international enterprises (Berleur & Whitehouse, 1997). As English becomes more prominent in the world, countries not using English as a first language are seeking ways to develop the use of English in their countries.

Over the past two decades there has been a significant increase in the number of people around the world who speak English as a second language (Baron, 2001; Harmer, 2001). Indeed, various eastern countries (e.g., China, Taiwan, Indonesia, Japan) are placing more importance on learning English as a second or other language, particularly as English has become the "lingua franca" for business transactions between countries (Cremer & Willes, 1998). Partly to address this issue,

ESL classes are now developing firm positions in many traditional non English-speaking countries.

ESL immersion in English-speaking countries

The role of English in the world today requires ESL educators to have a strong background in the pedagogy for teaching and learning English as a second or other language. Yet there are many divergent views on ESL teaching, particularly with debates between process and product, and results versus efforts along with various philosophical issues of connecting theory to practice (Eggers et al., 1995). In order to be effective in ESL teaching, ESL teachers need to develop philosophies, approaches, and methods for teaching English to students from other cultures (Hudson, 2003) . To do so requires an understanding of the ESL teacher's roles and responsibilities for teaching English in the four key areas: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The ESL teacher needs to create a balance between these key areas while addressing the students' English-learning needs. However, there is no specific set of roles and responsibilities for ESL teachers, as roles and responsibilities vary according to the teaching contexts. Nevertheless, determining the specific skills for ESL teaching requires an understanding of English communication practices.

Achieving high levels of language proficiency may occur through reading and writing followed by classroom discussion (Cummins, 2001). However, this study argues that English language needs to be learnt in context, particularly with listening and speaking, as many English meanings may not become apparent in a non English-speaking country. For example, idioms and other cultural assumptions influence the comprehension of communication. Likewise, writing patterns are embedded in culture (Escamilla & Coady, 2001).

Cultures, customs, beliefs, values, and attitudes can vary within and between countries, and so ESL teachers need to be aware of the cultural issues that may impact upon their teaching and their students' learning of English. Learning a new language involves learning about (but not necessarily wholeheartedly embracing) new ways of thinking, feeling and expressing (Ullman, 1997), and for ESL teachers this requires knowledge and understandings of *how* English operates within English-speaking countries. Cultural perspectives provide insights into ESL teaching and learning; therefore it is beneficial to have interactions with native speakers in an English-speaking country.

It has been argued (Bodycott & Crew, 2001; Evans et al., 2001) that long-term immersion in an English-only speaking environment can have negative effects, and that short-term prospects for English language immersion should be sought. It has been further argued that short-term language immersion programmes can achieve linguistic objectives (Murdoch & Adamson, 2001). While intensive English programmes within an English-only speaking environment can enhance experiences for non-native English speakers, the extent of English immersion necessary to produce significant results is not yet clear.

Assessments and system accountability

Accountability and accreditation are purposes behind ESL and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) programme evaluations, which requires an assessment of students' achievements (Lee, 1998; Lapp et al., 2001; Carreon, 2002). However, designing assessments to reflect the achievements of students is a task under much debate. Bolton et al (1997, p. 2) state:

The process of intercultural test development involves walking many "fine lines," such as those between cultures, between communicative and grammar-based teaching styles, between traditional and innovative item types, between having a test long enough to be reliable and short enough to administer in two class periods, and between maintaining consistency in design and scoring procedures while remaining flexible to meet the needs of the test and of the clientele.

For preservice ESL teachers, assessments may include diagnosis of individual needs, provision of information for accountability, and evaluation of programmes, and needs to appraise the readiness of preservice ESL teachers to enter the teaching profession. Assessments for university English proficiency are in early stages of development (Lumley & Qian, 2002), and overall prevailing ESL assessments (e.g., Japan) focus on grammar and vocabulary without full consideration of listening skills (Murphey, 2002). Brown (1998, p. 26) claims that institutions are "preparing tests that are haphazard and of unknown reliability and validity." Further, Brown argues "the perfect language test for many administrators and teachers would be an aptitude-proficiency-placement-diagnostic-progress-achievement test that does not take too long to administer and is very easy to score." This underscores the complexity of assessments and the reasons for such assessments. Nevertheless, reliable and valid assessments for ESL postgraduate courses must continue to be developed, particularly as education institutions are accountable for the quality of ESL teachers entering the workforce. Teacher education institutions require authentic assessments that measure essential aspects of ESL teacher development (O'Malley & Valdez Pierce, 1996). The following study provides an evaluation of a postgraduate preservice ESL teacher programme, with an emphasis on assessments and results to inform accountability concerns.

Data collection methods and analysis

This study seeks to describe and explain the evaluation of English proficiency achieved by preservice ESL teachers within a six-week English Language Immersion Programme (ELIP). This study uses qualitative and quantitative research methods for collecting, collating and analysing data, as these methods "can be considered as complementary, and they may be combined in a single research project" (Hittleman & Simon, 2002, p. 26). Part of this report embraces the interpretive approach that "adopts a *practical orientation* ", and involves the study of " *meaningful social action* " (Neuman, 2000, p. 71).

The qualitative research methods in this report are based on the axioms of qualitative inquiry as outlined by Neuman (2000), and Hittleman & Simon (2002). The qualitative data collection and analysis involved ELIP students' research notes within their assignments. Other data included reports from the ELIP Coordinator and the

classroom mentor (teacher) on assessments of each ELIP student's teaching . Data were analysed by collating the frequency of responses on specified areas of investigation (see Hittleman & Simon, 2002). Finally, comments from the ELIP teaching staff and the coordinating team provided further evaluation of the programme. Responses from all involved in the programme aimed at providing a qualitative assessment of the students' achievements.

The quantitative analyses aim to "examine relationships, including similarities or differences among variables" (Neuman, 2000, p. 66). They investigate correlations between variables that may have a "systematic relationship of occurrence" (see Hittleman & Simon, 2002, pp. 30-31). Although surveys can have varying scales, Hittleman and Simon (2002, p. 108) claim that a Likert scale forces "respondents to indicate their level of reaction". The Likert scales used in this study provide a "general estimate of a particular course's success based upon the views of the participants" (see Fisher & Weinberg, 1988, p. 75). Pretests and posttests on confidence levels had a scale from 1 to 10, and provide comparative results to indicate the programme's effectiveness. SPSS10, a statistical analysis computer package, was used to analyse confidence levels through frequencies, means, and standard deviations. Paired samples t-test compared the means of the pretest and the posttest, providing statistical significance of the mean differences. An evaluative survey was administered at the conclusion of the six-week programme that focused on the key components of the course. This survey was scaled "strongly disagree", "disagree", "uncertain", "agree", and "strongly agree". Finally, p retests and posttests were administered in listening, writing, reading, and grammar. These tests were reported in percentages.

Results

Context for ELIP

Nineteen ELIP students were involved in English language learning in a number of contexts. Firstly, their involvement in cultural understandings in the largest Australian city, along with observations of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) for two days in two different schools allowed students to establish a context for ESL teaching and learning. Secondly, the Intensive English Classes at a regional Australian university aimed at addressing the academic learning of English across the four key elements of: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The programme also provided ESL teaching strategies and opportunities for developing personal English proficiency. Thirdly, ELIP students were involved in observing and teaching in mainstream NSW school classes for two days a week (a total of eight days). They observed and participated in teaching English and other specialty subjects to English speaking students. Fourthly, homestay families provided ELIP students with Australian cultural understandings in an English-only environment. Finally, a variety of cultural experiences allowed for further development of English skills and understandings of Australian culture.

ELIP students spent approximately 50% of their time in the Intensive English Classes, which included learning about teaching practices, and 10% of their time in other classes (English through other key learning areas such as drama, music and dance). About 30% of their time was spent in schools for English teaching experiences, and

10% of the time was reserved for cultural and educational activities in English-only environments.

Within the six-week programme, four assignments were undertaken by the ELIP students involving: three reflective journal writings on their English learning and teaching experiences; a research report that focused on one key aspect of earning or teaching English; an essay on articulating the English language proficiency achieved through this programme; and, a portfolio, which was a compilation of the students' English teaching experiences within the programme. These assignments targeted ELIP students' English language proficiency, and their assessment provided feedback to the ELIP students and their institution.

Pretests and posttests on English language competencies

At the commencement and conclusion of the programme, ELIP students were administered a survey on which they rated their confidence levels (see Appendix 1 for survey). When entering this programme, ELIP students' pretests indicated that they were generally confident with reading aloud a newspaper in English, listening and speaking in a one-to-one conversation, and reading community signs and directions in English. Scores indicated that confidence levels began diminishing when it came to teaching English, debating in English, writing a reflective journal in English, formatting lessons for English teaching, and risk taking for teaching English.

Pretest/posttest results of a paired samples t-test showed significant and *highly* significant increases for 17 of the 19 items (see Table 1, mean paired differences range -3.26 to -1.10, standard deviation [sd] range 0.94 to 2.08, t-test range -3.48 to -9.50, p<0.005). Particularly notable was the overall ESL confidence increase in percentage terms for: writing lesson plans for English teaching (43%); writing a reflective journal (48%); participating in debates (52%); giving an evaluation of a concept; taking risks in teaching in English in an English only classroom (55%); understanding the format for teaching a lesson using English (61%). However, confidence for listening to a group of native speakers (6%), and speaking in a one-to-one English-only situation (1%) had not increased significantly (see Table 1).

Table 1: Pretest and posttest confidence levels: paired samples test

Order of pairs	Pretest & Posttest Pairs	MeanPaired Differences	Std. Deviation	T-test	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Listen & listen1	-1.26	1.37	-4.03	.001
Pair 2	Tv & tv1	-1.53	1.26	-5.27	.000
Pair 3	Group & group1	-1.18	1.07	-4.52	.000
Pair 4	Speaking & speaking1	-1.31	1.40	-3.75	.002
Pair 5	Teach & teach1	-2.76	2.04	-5.89	.000
Pair 6	Present & present1	-1.42	1.54	-4.03	.001
Pair 7	Readout & readout1	-1.18	1.48	-3.48	.003
Pair 8	Readsigns & readsigns1	-1.10	0.94	-5.14	.000
Pair 9	Lessonplan &	-2.60	1.55	-7.32	.000

	lessonplan1				
Pair 10	Report & report1	-1.63	1.61	-4.43	.000
Pair 11	Reflective & reflective1	-2.68	2.08	-5.62	.000
Pair 12	Interview & interview1	-1.97	1.50	-5.75	.000
Pair 13	Question & question1	-1.63	1.30	-5.47	.000
Pair 14	Openend & openend1	1.74	1.56	-4.86	.000
Pair 15	Debate & debate1	-2.32	1.20	-8.38	.000
Pair 16	Solution & solution1	-1.79	1.72	-4.54	.000
Pair 17	Evaluate & evaluate1	-1.90	1.37	-6.03	.000
Pair 18	Risk-taking & risk-taking1	-2.95	1.35	-9.50	.000
Pair 19	Format & format1	-3.26	1.82	-7.81	.000

Graph 1 presents the confidence levels determined from the pretests/posttests mean scores. Mean scores show that there is a significant increase from the pretest to the posttest in all but two of the items. Risk taking in ESL teaching, teaching English as a second language, writing reflective journals, and understanding the format for planning for an English lesson were at the lower end of the pretest scale. However, these aspects increased considerably with the posttest scores.

Graph 1: Pretest and posttest results for ELIP confidence levels
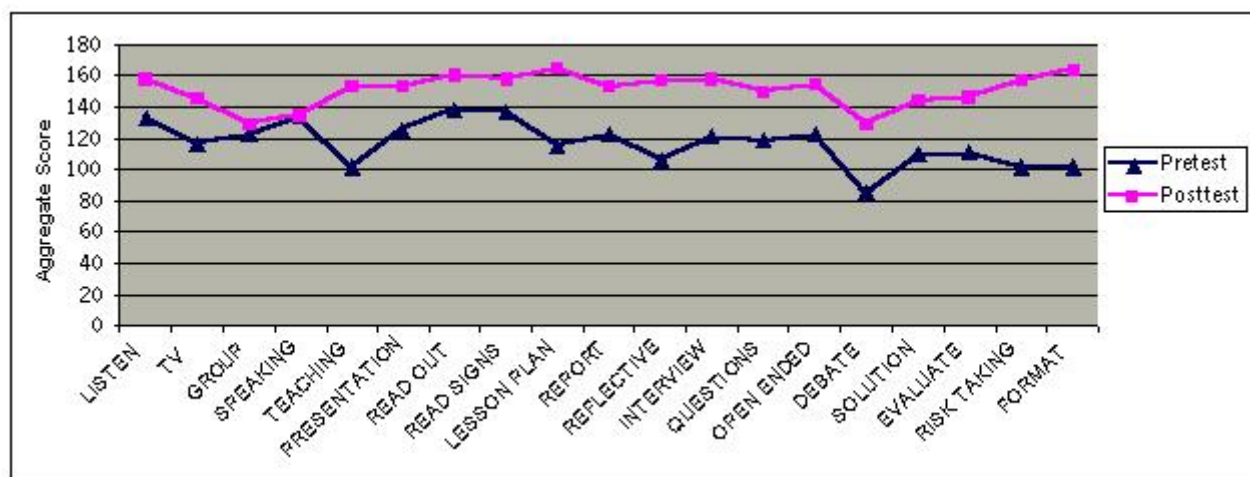
In the second week of the programme, the nineteen students were administered reading and listening assessment tests taken from a Cambridge University's International English Language Testing System (IELTS) practice test booklet. At the conclusion of the programme, they were again administered different reading and listening assessments from the same publication. As the participants were not given all of the components of the IELTS practice test, it was not appropriate to calculate an IELTS band score as a result. Instead, a percentage score was given for both the

listening and reading components. The Australian host university devised the writing and grammar pretests and posttests.

Individual scores varied from pretests to posttests for listening, reading, writing, and grammar. As a cohort, listening increased by 20% (average mean score: pretest=68.1%, posttest=81.4%), and writing increased by 24% (average mean score: pretest=68.8%, posttest=85.3%). Despite this, the pretests and posttests for grammar (average mean score =1%) and reading (average mean score =-1%) presented insignificant or no gains. This may be attributed to the students' current education in Hong Kong, where they are postgraduates, mainly with English majors.

It may be concluded that stand-alone grammar tests and IELTS reading tests may not have an assessable place in the ELIP, as these appear to be covered by the Hong Kong education system. English grammar and (silent) reading of texts may be learnt without English cultural experiences, as these do not necessarily require speech and texts are generally established within context. However, writing (and speaking) requires cognition and articulation of English in context, and listening to English also requires an understanding of the culture, particularly with the "local language". Language immersion programmes need to focus on the language development that is derived from the cultural interactions. Aspects of English that can be learnt in the students' home country should play a secondary role in overseas' immersion programmes; therefore writing, speaking and listening (along with cultural understandings) should be at the forefront of these programmes.

Intensive English classes

The Intensive English Classes provided a focus for developing the overall language awareness and competence of the participants through communicative, and whole language task-based activities. The classes further explored issues in English language teaching methodology with a particular focus on approaches and activities suitable for primary school teaching.

There were four main assignments for the ELIP students, comprising a reflective journal, a research report, an essay, and a portfolio. The reflective journal writings provided an opportunity to reflect academically, socially, and culturally. These journals were reviewed on three different occasions. The assessment was based on the level of reflection that participants were able to demonstrate in relation to the English learning and teaching process they were undergoing (see Appendix 2 for journal reflection criteria). Compared with the first reflective journal writing task (mean=61.7, sd=5.59), the cohort had demonstrated a 29% increase with their last reflective journal writing (p<0.001, mean=79.6, sd=8.13). Using the same marking criteria, results from the reflective journal writing also indicated a narrower range in a higher scale (range 65 to 90 compared with the range 55 to 72.5), and a mean increase of 18.

The report assignment allowed students to investigate areas of interest. Each student's report was based on a research topic and included a series of structured or semi-structured interview questions. This promoted English interaction with native speakers. Moreover, student investigation enhanced English proficiency as their

research aided in identifying key areas required for ESL development. For example, one student had investigated the speaking skills of the ELIP students and had written:

[The tutor] found that the general problem for the [ELIP] students is the completion of syllables. Some students usually do not pronounce words with the full syllable, especially the final syllable, /t/, /d/, /s/, and /k/. Moreover, some of the [ELIP students] may speak too fast but miss one or two syllables, which create difficulties in understanding the speaker.

This report allowed ELIP students to evaluate their own English learning in relation to the self-designed area of interest. For example, the student above who had focused on speaking skills made concerted efforts to pronounce final syllables, and had commented on two occasions that she was trying to improve these aspects of her speech. Speaking and listening are ESL components that provide a direct immersion focus that may not be available in the student's home country. Hearing the intonations and pace of speech allow immersion students to experience language in use.

An interim self-reflection on the student learning of English was provided to the students after the first third of the programme. Students were asked to list three valuable concepts, ideas, or content learned so far, and state one area/concept/idea they would like to explore further. Students' responses varied considerably, stating that they found valuable: classroom management strategies, writing text types, English language games, proverbs, similes and metaphors, drama, report writing, integrating English in science, writing a lesson plan, teaching reading skills, poetry writing, using a newspaper for language development, alliterations, and attention gaining techniques for teaching. They also indicated with varying responses that they would like to explore further: teaching strategies for reading, writing, listening, and grammar, games for developing English, integrating English in other subject areas, planning lessons, poetry writing, classroom management, and, strategies for teaching from textbooks in fun ways. This interim self-reflection provided teaching staff with more information towards addressing the students' English proficiency and ESL teaching needs.

Professional school experiences

The students experienced ESL teaching first-hand, particularly with strategies for speaking, listening, reading, and writing. All students had an opportunity to teach in their allocated classes, although the extent and frequency of these opportunities depended on the teacher's programme. According to their evaluative surveys, all students indicated that the professional experiences developed their understanding for teaching English as a second language. Ninety percent of students specified that their listening and speaking skills were particularly enhanced because of this experience. *All* students indicated that their teaching skills had improved as a consequence of their school visits, which developed a better understanding of how children learn English and how teachers teach English as a second language.ELIP student experiences in the schools were highly valued as indicated by the following four comments:

- ELIP student 3: It is a good experience to teach students who are native English speakers and from another culture and country.

- ELIP student 8: We gained encouragement and confidence after the school visit.
- ELIP student 14: The school visits enhanced my teaching skills. The class teacher gave melots of advice for my teaching.
- ELIP student 18: I really learned how to be more professional in teaching.

The students were provided with an individual professional experience (field experience) report on their teaching (see Appendix 3), and specific feedback for developing their teaching practices, which also included personal development for improving their own English. The report provided a clear assessment on the key components for their teaching of English. By the end of the professional experience, all ELIP students indicated they either "satisfactorily established" or "well-established" general professional attributes, planning, implementation, and management for teaching and learning English. In addition, students demonstrated increased capabilities for using appropriate English language with correct grammar and pronunciation. They also developed better voice control and projection, and responded more appropriately to ESL students' interactions as their professional experiences proceeded. The ELIP Coordinator and classroom mentors also commented generally on the improvement of the students' teaching over the short-term professional experience period. These assessments of the students' learning indicated that ESL preservice teachers enhanced their pedagogical understandings through ELIP. This form of assessment provided a clear indication of the students' achievements that can be used for accountability and accreditation.

Evaluation of homestay experiences

The ELIP Coordinator informally interviewed all homestay families more than once during the programme, and again at the conclusion of the programme. The overall comments about the ELIP students from homestay families were very positive. Homestays commented that the students were generally cooperative and their English was of a good or high standard. More than half the homestays claimed that they had noticed a distinct improvement in the ELIP students' listening and speaking by the end of the programme. The homestay families also indicated that they had learnt a great deal about Hong Kong and China because of the students' ability to communicate in English.

According to the evaluative survey, ninety-five percent of students stated that their homestay families assisted in developing their English skills by providing opportunities to listen and talk in English. Eight out of nineteen homestay families commented that they were surprised ELIP students did not participate in the preparation and cleaning up after the evening meal. Nearly all the homestays commented that the academic workload of the students was so great that they did not maximise their opportunity to converse in English during the evenings. Some homestays felt that some opportunities were "wasted" because the students were studying and not conversing. Listening and speaking are key focuses of ELIP, particularly as these are aspects they may not be received adequately in Hong Kong.

Ninety-five percent of ELIP students definitely wanted to see their homestay family again and would like other ELIP students to have *this* homestay experience. One student investigated homestays as part of her report assignment and commented, "The ELIP creates a win-win situation for both host families and students. It widens both

parties' knowledge of culture, and improves communication and social skills." The following four comments also highlight English learning, cultural, and relationship benefits gained from the homestay aspect of this programme:

- ELIP student 6: Homestay was the most effective way to improve students' English in different aspects. They helped me to adapt to life in Australia.I also enjoy living with them.
- ELIP student 8:   I enjoyed their family parties and I learnt a lot of culture from them.
- ELIP student 9: We learnt Australian slang, idioms, culture, and life style.
- ELIP student 17: This is the most valuable part in this programme, in which I was really "immersed" in English, and I gained friendship and love from it.

However, two students were moved to other homestay families early in the programme because of cultural aspects that did not suit these students (e.g., pets). Later in the programme one student commented that her homestay "mother", who was the only person in the home, was not "warm", and found it difficult to feel comfortable with her. She stated, "In my opinion, a single person is not suitable to be a host family due to inactive interaction." Conversely, two other students with only one person at home commented on how much they enjoyed the experience. Another issue is that homestays may have more than one student and even though these students are of different nationalities (e.g., Japanese, Vietnamese), opportunities for conversing in English may be limited. One student was affected in this way in the ELIP.   She stated, "I would have felt more comfortable and happier if they hadn't taken three students (different nationalities and different languages) at the same period because they spent less time on me." Matching homestays with ELIP students occurred through information provided by each, yet there may be other elements not recorded on the information sheet that might not suit either party. Although this was a short-term programme, it is still beneficial to rearrange homestays if problems exist; however this will depend upon availability of homestays and the willingness for participants to make this change.

The learning of colloquial language and cultural understandings from homestay participation may be too broad to test.   Nevertheless, homestay and ELIP student responses indicated that homestays are very successful for learning about culture and the English language. It appears that assessing the extent of English learnt from homestays may be achieved through a self-evaluative survey provided to ELIP students. Indeed, students are well positioned to gauge their English language development in relation to their homestay visit.

Implications and limitations

The evaluative survey indicated that the programme strengthened and extended ELIP students' English language proficiency, with 90% of students stating that the assignments also strengthened and extended their English language proficiency. Although the extent of this English language development will be difficult to measure, these ELIP students are adults and have voluntarily entered an ESL teacher education course; therefore it is in their best interests to articulate accurately the extent of their learning from an English language immersion programme. ELIP students need to be made aware that they are responsible for their learning and need to state positive and negative aspects so that programme organisers can plan more effectively.

Students claimed that their understanding of teaching and learning English as a second language was enhanced considerably in the Intensive English Classes (100%), at their school visits (100%), and in the overall programme (95%). The evaluation survey provides no measurable value added but rather gauges students' perceptions of their own learning, which requires students to be critically evaluative. Nevertheless, ELIP students indicated that the school visits and Intensive English Classes assisted their pedagogical knowledge for developing ESL lessons and provided them with a range of ESL teaching techniques and experiences

Recommendations and suggestions

Recommendations for improving ELIP programmes mainly centred on: reducing workloads, establishing timeframes for tests, standardising tests, entering the host country with some experience in ESL teaching, and accessing resources.

Firstly, a key reason for homestay programmes is the involvement of students in first-hand communication experiences with the English language. In this study, ELIP students requested more interaction with host families and native English speakers, as the number of assignments they had to complete for both the home and host country limited this interaction. Instead of interacting with their homestay families, students would go to their bedrooms at night to do their assignments. It is recommended that organisers from the host country and the ELIP students' country need to coordinate assignments so that students are not overwhelmed or overburdened, which can allow for ample opportunities to maximise their interactions with native English speakers.

Secondly, assessments for accountability need to occur if English language proficiency programmes are to be justified. In a six-week programme pretests and posttests took a little less than two university-scheduled days to administer. It is suggested that if pretests were administered either by the home country's institution or by the ELIP Coordinator during an orientation programme in the home country, then teaching time would be increased in the English-speaking country. In addition, the time difference between pretests and posttests would commensurate with the introduction to the programme, which may show a further increase in ESL development.

Thirdly, the ELIP students' institution may have several programmes operating simultaneously in different English speaking countries. It is suggested that there may be the possibility of standardising pretests and posttests between participating centres so that students are assessed using the same criteria. This would also assist the ELIP students' institution to evaluate learning and learning environments to determine effective practices.

Fourthly, this particular programme focused on the development of ESL teaching skills. However, most ELIP students had not taught in a classroom before coming to Australia. It is recommended that students receive an opportunity to observe and teach English as a second language in their own country first. In this way, they will have some experience with planning and implementing English language teaching, and will have some familiarity with the ESL teaching and learning environment. By having this experience before commencing the programme, and as a prerequisite to the programme, students will have some background knowledge and understanding of

ESL teaching in their own country. Students can therefore build upon past experiences for developing their ESL teaching practices. This may assist their understanding of adapting English teaching practices in Australia to ESL teaching in their home country.

Finally, ELIP students' learning of English needs to be scaffolded with effective practices and links to theories for ESL teaching. Students require access to libraries in order to complete assignments; however borrowing rights may be difficult to secure on a short-term basis. It is recommended that institutions in host countries provide a book of readings at the commencement of the programme that focus on the assignment details. Hence, borrowing may not become an issue. In addition, ELIP students need to have early familiarisation with teacher education databases and Internet sources that may aid their learning of ESL teaching.

Discussions and conclusions

While all of the programme objectives were achieved, the extent of this achievement appeared to depend on the pre-programme English proficiency of students. To draw an analogy, a child learning to ride a bicycle will fall many times but within a relatively short period can increase the bike riding skills to show obvious improvements. A relatively skilled adult cyclist will not show the same dramatic level of improvement but rather will refine skills to become more capable. Similarly, these students have a degree and many majored in English. Therefore, there were initial reservations from programme organisers as to the *level* of increase of English language proficiency the programme would provide for such students. Indeed, these students were *refining* their English skills to become more proficient with personal developments in the language and for achieving higher-levels of proficiency for teaching English as a second language.

ESL confidence levels developed and assessed in this programme may be affected by two key factors. Firstly, ELIP students with a degree, and many with an English major, may feel quite confident in Hong Kong, as they generally talk with other English (L2) people. Secondly, students who enter an English-only speaking environment may self-assess their English skills in comparison to native speakers and may decide that their English is not as proficient as originally thought. Taking this into account, confidence levels can affect the programme's impact on developing participants' English language proficiency. ESL confidence level pretests/posttests can be one measure of a student's development, but would require additional evidence. Evaluative surveys may also be used to determine the success of such a programme. However, these would need to be comprehensive and provide for the range of responses that may occur.

Teaching experiences with school visits, Intensive English Classes, homestays, and cultural programmes motivated the students to achieve English skills towards significantly higher proficiency levels in particular areas. However, students with lower initial English proficiency had shown greater improvement in this programme. Those with higher initial English proficiency refined their skills and, therefore, standardised tests to indicate such improvements may not be appropriate. Assessing advanced ESL postgraduate students requires rethinking standardised testing. If there is proficiency in English grammar and reading, grammar and reading assessments

may be incorporated into general assignments in English-speaking universities that are graded to the university standard. In this way, ESL writing and cognition of concepts capabilities may be assessed for both English language proficiency and ESL teaching.

Learning English and learning to teach English as a second language in this programme provided all of these students with a greater understanding of the language. As stated by Aristotle reminds us, "Teaching is the highest form of understanding," and Seneca adds, "while we teach, we learn". This cohort of ELIP students received first-hand opportunities to teach in an English-only environment, which not only assisted their ESL teaching but also enhanced their own learning of English. Valid and reliable assessments need to be continually developed as these can aid towards providing trustworthy accountability, certifiable accreditation, and a way to improve upon immersion programmes and practices.

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Appendix 1
Appendix 2
Appendix 3

Biodata
Peter Hudson has been involved in Education for the past 25 years, during which time I have spent 10 years as a principal of a primary school. These experiences include teaching English in British Columbia in 1987, ESL teaching in Ottawa in 2001, and lecturing postgraduate   students in teaching English as a second or other language at Southern Cross University.

Sue Hudson has been involved in Education for 24 years. For the past 13 years I have lectured at Southern Cross University in Creative Arts, English, Professional Experience and TESOL. I have had the opportunity to teach English overseas and for the last three years have planned and coordinated university TESOL programs for university students from Hong Kong and Japan.