

Conversation Partnerships: An Educational Tool for Cross-Cultural Understanding

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Abstract

This article describes one study of conversation partnerships between American students enrolled in teacher education programs, and international students enrolled at the same large midwestern university. Twenty-nine pairs of partners during one 15-week semester were directed to meet at least 10 times minimally 30 minutes each. Topics for initial meetings were recommended, to help partners get started. As the semester progressed, topics were based on interests and needs of the partners. Three data sources were collected and analyzed. International students were surveyed at the end of the program with demographic and open-ended question about their perceived outcomes of the experience. American students were required to keep and submit weekly logs of the meetings and their thoughts about the meeting. These students were further required to write an end-semester reflection paper, exploring their learning in areas of: better understanding the English language; learning about other cultures; and any other meaningful insights about the experience. These latter two data sources were analyzed qualitatively, using constant comparative analysis. Results of the study, overall, were positive with interesting insights from participants. International students reported improving their English. American students had their “eyes opened” repeatedly about other cultures. Many of the partners reported the forming on genuine and hopefully sustainable friendships. Often, the partnerships went beyond the course requirements spending evenings, or weekend days together.

Keywords: Conversation partners; multicultural education; diversity; teacher education; English language learning; English language learners; higher education; English as a Foreign Language; English as a Second Language; TESOL; strategies for diversity learning; diversity of learning; foreign language education.

Introduction

Many international students from non-English speaking cultures, especially from expanding countries like China, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, arrive in the U.S. every year to study in higher education. As a result, schools across the United States are enrolling more linguistically diverse student populations than ever before (Garcia & Cuellar, 2006). Unfortunately, most of these students lack the practical English to get along in everyday life, and to tackle the language demands of their university classes. For this reason, higher education institutions have recently tended to integrate more communicative language teaching methods and strategies like *conversation partnership* into their curriculum.

Conversation partnerships are the pairing of native speakers of a language with language learners of that language, whether these partnerships are highly structured or only partially structured. Partners meet regularly to talk in the target language. The aim is to encourage international students to voluntarily participate in communicative and social activities to help them achieve a smooth integration while experiencing education in the U.S.

In consideration of the advent of this study, a literature review was attempted. After thorough searching, no studies of conversation partners could be located. Mentions of conversation partners were found, generally on websites of various schools and universities. Sometimes these websites talked extensively about conversation partner programs, including detailed guidelines offered to the native speakers in the partnership. However, there is much about the conversation partnership in principle that makes sense.

Implementing conversation partner programs makes sense with what is known about learning as well as language learning specifically. Such programs are consistent with constructivist learning, with critical practices that can reveal insights in regards to how individuals develop language skills and improve their conversational experiences (Cutting & Dunn, 2006). Clearly,

language knowledge is complexly dynamic and contextually shaped (Hall, Cheng & Carlson, 2006; Meskill & Sadykova, 2011). And, language competency is no longer viewed as a set of static competencies based on the ideal native speaker model (Larsen-Freeman & Freeman, 2008). The complexities of learning a new language extend far beyond words, beyond textbook-based learning, beyond rules for grammar and syntax, and beyond conjugating verbs.

Developing communicative competence requires *active involvement*. In this case, conversation partnerships offer the international English language learners authentic interaction with American peers. Conversation partnerships can be an easy and effective remedy that might scaffold continuous acquisition of communication skills because of the authentic interaction (Tudini, 2007), practicing skills in real time communication. A language learner's participation in dialogues with native speakers can be linked not only to acquiring basic social and communicative skills, but also to understanding differences of others, interacting with a predefined purpose, responding appropriately to utterances, and building confidence in speaking.

Many international students can be overwhelmingly challenged by the enormity of the process of learning English in another culture. Zangari (1999) suggests that while trying to communicate, international students might be "bogged down with details, particularly with correctness, and therefore lack the confidence to take advantage of the abundance of opportunities that immersion provides" (p. 1). Of course, this may not be the case for all international students, and it can be a mistake to make overgeneralizations. Some students may have innate potential or natural talent for learning languages, while for others, the task can be daunting. With the right systematic strategies, both International and American students can overcome hesitation about exploring new linguistic and cultural frontiers. They may also achieve a comfortable rapport leading to more effective learning experiences in a conversation partnership.

Taking advantage of conversing with native speakers on a regular schedule, learners can move away from formal language instruction and delve into a more authentic use of English. As partners become more comfortable with each other, newer English speakers can take more risks trying out new ways of saying things, and getting suggestions for how to say things from their partners. This authenticity in conversing is a critical component of good exposure and practice for non-native speakers, and this can be achieved via such engaging programs (Williams, 2009).

American student participants can benefit from the central purpose of conversation partnership programs. Americans are offered opportunities to get to know the life styles of people from other cultures, to appreciate diversity, and to understand the concept of being a global citizen. This experience is almost as good as traveling to different countries and getting to know more about new cultures. The demographics of northeast Ohio, where this study took place, means that many U.S. undergraduate and graduate students studying at Kent State University will have had limited experiences, if any, with people who look, think, and talk differently than they do. Since American participants in this study are all in teacher education, seeking to become K-12 teachers, acquiring skills for meeting the needs of diverse learners in their future classrooms becomes an important goal.

In a multicultural context such as in the United States, and in higher education, these basic intercultural skills can be crucially important. In order to support such cultural integration and exchange, many English as Second Language (ESL) departments in American universities today try to implement conversation partnership programs via voluntary work.

While in theory, these types of programs can have great contributions to improving the quality of language learning experience, there is no solid evidence that voluntary conversation programs are actively integrated into the overall curricular structures. In other words, conversation

partnership programs which are implemented based on a voluntary participation cannot count on the language learners becoming an active member of the target language community. Such programs do not always attain the intended goals or learning outcomes on behalf of both international and American students for four reasons: (1) no payment is offered; (2) no curricular or communicative guidance is provided; (3) meeting schedule may be dictated by the institutions; and (4) above all, limited cultural orientation is provided about how to approach individuals from other communities and how to address their differences appropriately.

In the study reported here, the American side of the conversation partnerships is not voluntary, but rather built in to a language arts and literacy course. In order to query the effectiveness of such programs, therefore, the elements of this inquiry are built upon the following questions: What can we learn about conversation partnerships in regards to a) International students' perceptions? b) American students' perceptions? and c) what are recommendations for future conversation partnership programs?

Research Design and Method

Participants

Conversation partners involved in this study are American citizens and international students from different countries, including China, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Liberia, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, and Vietnam. The undergraduate and graduate American students enrolled in one online literacy course were matched with conversation partners who were international students enrolled in programs across campus. A questionnaire was used to pair students of the same gender, age range, and interests, where possible. Due to the higher number of female American students and male international students, matching the partners according to their gender preferences was not always possible.

American students (4 male and 25 female), were successfully matched with international students. Each American student was given the email of his/her international conversation partner and asked to initiate the first contact. In the end, 29 conversation pairs were created.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

There were three data sources in this study. First of all, one instrument, a survey, was developed and used to collect feedback from the international students; Second, weekly logs of meetings were kept by the American students which included the time, place, duration, and a summary of the meeting; and third, there was an end reflection paper written as an assignment for the online course where American students were directed to reflect on their experience and their learning.

The Survey. The following procedures were used to develop a survey. Questions which seemed viable were tested on volunteers to ensure they were understandable to second language speakers, and revised as needed. Each survey question was also evaluated to make sure that items addressed research questions. Based upon feedback, the final survey instrument was developed. The survey included two parts: *Part A* contained six close-ended questions, which were demographic in nature. These questions mainly dealt with length of participants' English experience, and also the number of years of English instruction, their self-perception of their competence in English, how often and in what way they conversed with their partners from the program (in person, by phone, by computer, etc.), and whether or not this was the first time they had been part of such a program.

Part B contained 10 questions. Overall, most of the 10 questions were open-ended, which required subjects to compose narrative responses. These questions were assumed to reflect richer and more insightful opinions of international students, as they allowed them to answer questions in their own words, enabling researchers to learn about these students' unique perspectives. All these

were used to investigate international students' experiences in the conversation partnership program (Appendix-A: Conversation Partnership Survey). *Qualtrics* was the software used for the survey, which was available through a site license with the university.

The American Student Logs and Final Reflections. Two narrative qualitative data sources were collected from the American students. First, the weekly logs that were kept were submitted following the 10 required partner meetings. American students were required to maintain weekly logs in which they gave detailed information on their meetings such as where they took place, how long they lasted, and what they talked about. These logs varied in length, depth, and quality. Logs were submitted to the course instructor, and then the researcher downloaded them from *Blackboard Learn*, which is a software licensed by the university for delivery of online courses and management of other face-to-face courses.

The second qualitative, narrative data source was the end of the semester final reflections, where more insights were expected from the American students. Several guidelines were provided by the instructor for these reflections. First, the reflection should include what the American students believed they learned about their own language. Second, they were asked to reflect on their cultural learning. Third, they were invited to say anything they wanted to about their experiences with their international conversation partners.

Implementation. All data in this study were collected electronically. The document for matching partners was distributed to the American conversation partners via email. Additional instructions on how to keep the weekly log and how to write the reflection paper were given to the American conversation partners in the online course. The survey for the international conversation partners was distributed at the end of ten weeks via email. American partners were asked to urge their partners to complete the survey.

There were some problems that occurred during implementation. For example several international conversation partners who participated voluntarily didn't answer emails or dropped out early. Their designated American conversation partners then had to be matched with other students. A problem of a different nature occurred when an international male student insisted that his female American conversation partner attend their meetings in his apartment. In this case, the female American conversation partner immediately contacted her course instructor and the researcher, and the female student was assigned a new international conversation partner.

Analysis. For the two narrative data sources from the American students, and the open ended questions from the international students on the survey, the same basic procedures were applied. The responses were combed for categories and patterns using the constant comparative method. As Glaser emphasized (1965), the coding process in grounded theory relies heavily on the constant comparative method where the researcher begins analysis with the first data collected and constantly compares indicators, concepts and categories as the theory emerges. In connection with this qualitative approach, the researcher followed a research path for looking systematically at the data sources, including weekly logs and final reflections, aiming at the generation of theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

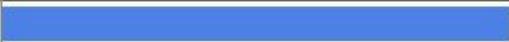
For the close-ended items in the survey of international student partners, the Qualtrics software did some of the hard work, presenting items with the summaries of each type of responses. Open-ended items were analyzed similarly to the narrative data from the American partners. However, these open ended responses were very brief, making analysis easier.

RESULTS

Conversation Partnership A Benefit for International Students

With the helps of Qualtrics, we explored each of the survey questions. The responses to the following question showed that having a conversation is a beneficial experience for international students.

1. Do you believe having a conversation partner was a benefit?

#	Answer		%
1	Yes		100%
2	No		0%
	Total		100%

The following questions about how this experience helped international students in their studies confirmed the benefit of having a conversation partner, as illustrated in the following analysis.

2. Do you think this experience helped you in your studies?

#	Answer		%
1	Yes		93%
2	No		7%
	Total		100%

As for gaining insights regarding the cultural aspect, the following question focuses on the experiential side in having a conversation partner. The following open-ended question gives the participants freedom to share their personal experiences and to reflect them in a relatively more

detailed way, as shown in the following representative responses:

5- Could you tell us about your best experience with your conversation partner?

Text Response

Yeah! We meet and talk about our educational and private lives. We hangout to food centers off campus. We goes to Walmart to shops. We're concern about one another.

DRIVING TO RAVENNA FOR THE DRIVER LICENCE

I have chance to learn more about the American culture.

We met on weekends and did some activities together.

One time we eat dinner together, we got to talk about the differences between american food and the Indian food. We also started talking about american holidays and Indian holidays and about the difference in schools.

We talked about special meanings of something in two countries.

Practice with second language to learn something

Her friendship.

Finally, since this survey concentrated on how linguistic and communicative competence could be enhanced through such cooperative linguistic involvement in conversing with a native speaker, the result shows that there is a common agreement among international students on the value of interacting with native speakers in the process of integrating the target culture.

4. Do you think this experience helped you speak in your daily life?

#	Answer	%
1	Yes	100
2	No	0
	Total	100

The following Qualtrics survey item, which followed the yes/no options, supports this perspective and proves that this program enhances the usage of language and overall linguistic

skills of international students. Not all respondents chose to add a narrative response.

19. If yes, why?

Text Response

It more improve my communication skills.

I CAN GET THE ACCENT BETTER

Communicating in English is important

Yes, because i got to speak English more on a weekly basis.

The conversation between my partner and I improve my oral English and make me have confidence to speak with others.

Talking with friends conversation

Daily language is more different than academic language. To improve daily language, we must more speak with somebody who is American.

The Analyses of American Conversation Partner Weekly Logs

The weekly logs of the American students were all gathered together and merged in a single file. To ensure anonymity, all 29 American participants were given a numerical code such as P1, P2, P3 ... P29. The decision of disaggregating some of the week responses was made to get detailed insights on how each meeting went, based on the notion that the beginning sessions would likely be different from ones once partners gained rapport and comfort with each other.

Week One. All accumulated week 1 logs were analyzed, and the features of data were marked with descriptive words and category names. Common patterns that were identified in the preliminary analysis were collected under three main headings: *Detailed information about the meeting; conversation topics, and thoughts and emotions.*

Detailed information about the first meeting was divided into three subheadings including *place, way of meeting and duration.* During the first meeting students met at comfortable public areas such as the Kent State University Student Center, dormitory common spaces, the library, restaurant, bars, cafes and virtual meeting contexts such as *Skype.* Students were instructed to have

meetings for a minimum of 30 minutes, but unexpectedly, some conversation meetings lasted much longer. The types of general findings of the first meeting are shown in Figure 1 below.

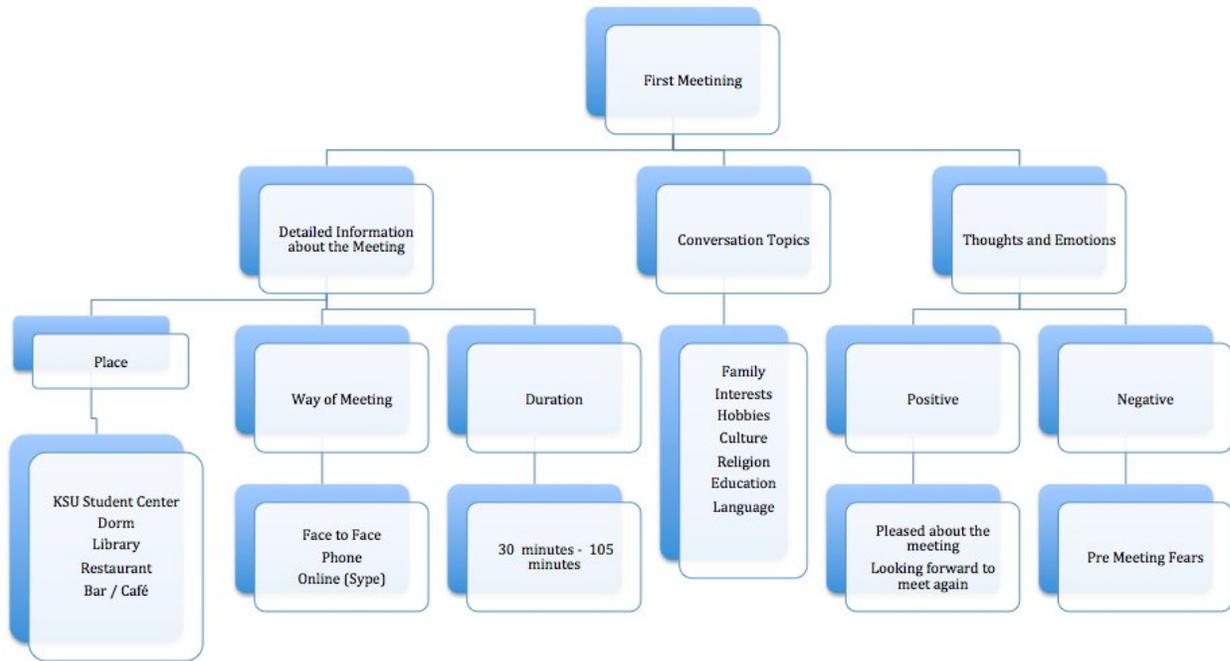


Figure 1 – The Analysis of the First Meetings

Weekly Logs Weeks Two to Nine. Weekly Logs from Week Two to Nine were merged to enable researchers to see possible shifts in the partnership experience, to explore the changes and or similarities of the topics in meetings and finally to give an overall view of the program. During those weeks, some remarkable changes in meetings were found. For instance, partners extended the length of the meeting times. In some cases, conversation partners spent more than three, four, or even five hours together. The main reason for this change was the activities or venues where meetings took place, such as going out for dinner, going to the theater, buying a car, watching a movie together and doing grocery shopping. One participant (P16) invited her international conversation partner to her hometown to stay with her family over the weekend. She said, “My husband found some coffee mugs he wanted to buy for XXX because they both enjoyed coffee. I

bought a small plate with an Amish scene on it as a gift that he could give to someone when he got home.” The sort of rapport expressed in this partnership became typical of many of the partnerships as the semester progressed.

Weekly Log, Week Ten. Week Ten represented the last log entry, and so the researchers wanted to see how this partnership ended. In most responses, the partners intended to stay in contact in the future. For example P7 said, “I told XXX that she could still call me if she had any questions. She told me that she was going to call me the next time she was at the drug store. I laughed, but she wasn’t joking.” And P19 wrote, “It was sad that it was our last time official meeting but I have a feeling we will see each other before she leaves. Her dislikes of the United States were the same dislikes of mine, which I thought was really interesting. I am really glad she has been having such a great experience here and I hope I contributed to that.” Many pairs expressed regret about the occurrence of the last meeting.

Findings from Weekly Log Data Source

The results of the constant comparative analysis of the weekly logs fell into several areas. These include *cultural understanding* and *socialization*.

Areas of cultural understanding. To begin with, weekly logs posted by the American conversation partners revealed some trends. In a sense, they put effort to better understand the culture they were not familiar with, and cultural understanding was seen as a priority in the majority of responses throughout the ten-week-period. In addition popular topics such as education, politics, and sports were common. Conversations broached more sensitive subjects including religion, marriage, pregnancy, gender issues, and traditions. This led to some comparisons, some surprises, but productive discussions. For example, P19 said, “I find that whenever we meet, the time flies by- I really can't believe that an hour goes so fast. We have so much to talk about, and I

think we're both really interested in each other's lives, which makes this experience so fun.” And P10 wrote, “I felt like an expert on Ohio during this meeting, and a lot of the questions that he had I was able to answer very easily. He hasn't been around the state very much, so I was able to give him some good recommendations of places to go before he moves or leaves for home. I am still so glad I got the partner that I did, he's very interested in learning about America and telling me about his own culture.”

Responses also proved that after meeting several times; the conversation partnership turned out to be a socialization experience through which individuals made good friends, rather than this being just a class assignment.

Areas of socialization. When the entirety of responses were evaluated, it is clearly seen that socialization seems to be one of the critical central themes. Beginning with Week Two, venues like theatre, cinemas, and personal home visits were also popular meeting spots besides bars and cafes. This may be seen as a sign of growing confidence and trust in the partnerships. Cooking together, inviting a partner home for dinner, and above all, increasing durations of meetings supports the idea that conversation partners were developing beyond merely a course assignment. In this respect, the program provided participants with more opportunities to make new friends, and even included individuals from American partners' families or friends. While conversing, participants tended to compare each other's countries, dating styles, relationships, educational backgrounds, food and even the medical health care.

For example, one of the U.S. males spent a great deal of time helping his international student to select, purchase, and register a car. This included multiple visits to auto dealerships, a trip to the county registration office for motor vehicles, and needed banking transactions. These kinds of tasks are difficult for newcomers, and having a local friend as a resource was valuable.

Similarly, P1 stated, “We drove over to the license bureau in Ravenna in order for XXX to take the driving portion of the license test. XXX read the computer based test booklet the night I gave it to him during our second meeting and took the test the very next day and passed, so I offered to take him to take the driving part this week and he also passed.” Other students reported helping their partners find needed items in a pharmacy, grocery store, or other specialty shop.

Findings from Final Reflections on the Conversation Partnership Experience

This program has raised the awareness of American conversation partners in terms of the challenges that international students might face in social life. Indeed, gradual participation of American students in this program caused a shift from doing an activity for the course work to having become true partners. The course requirement mostly transformed into a meaningful learning experience. American students emphasized that, thanks to this experience, they would bring a more positive attitude while addressing people from other cultures, as implied in the responses that follow. American students were asked to reflect on *their experiences learning about English, learning about culture, and anything else they wanted to say about the experience.*

Experiences learning about English. American student partners were mostly naive about international issues and had very limited experiences with second language speakers. Very few American students spoke any other languages. Consequently, the American partners were repeatedly surprised by questions their partners asked about English, and realized that sometimes, English usage and expressions are difficult to explain.

One way this came up, was when international students brought them schoolwork for help. They were asked to help interpret directions on assignments from various professors, and to read over papers and assignments for correct English. Statements such as “I never thought about it that way before,” showed their continuous surprise at their own native language. One insightful student

reflected, “I learned that our English language is very complex. I would find it difficult to learn our language. It is very confusing. The Turkish language and vocabulary is much different. Their letters do not have as many sounds as our do. I have a better understanding of just how difficult learning English can be. This was an eye opener to me. As a developing teacher this was insightful. It will help me to have a better understanding of what a student would be experiencing while trying to function and learn in a classroom when English is not their first language.”

Similarly, another American student had some strong responses to their learning about English, “XXX taught me a lot about our English language. I learned how important other countries outside of the United States view our language and that it is a main priority to teach it in their schools. XXX spoke English very well and told me she has known how to speak English since she entered school. I cannot help but to think how the United States does not require our schools to teach us another language let alone make sure we are learning one all through school. This really opened my eyes to how close minded the United States can be at times. I also learned that even the things that I find confusing about our language she did as well. It really showed the connection and similarities we had about English even though we have completely different backgrounds.”

Learning about culture. By far, the most responses students make in final reflections were about culture. They made statements such as how they have had their “eyes opened” to the different ways of the world. Little else in the teacher education program had the same impact on them, because their exposure to other cultures was limited. In some cases, students had experienced field placements that may include minority groups within the U.S., and perhaps children of very low income families. But, these generally do not include cultures outside the United States.

Students do seem to accept that what they have learned at the end of this experience about culture matters as a future teacher. For example, P6 wrote, “This experience as a future teacher has

taught me to recognize and be sensitive to culture. Not all my students will have the same heritage as me and I should be sensitive to their culture because it is as important to them as mine is to me. In addition, I need to realize that it contributes to who you are and many times is the reason for your actions. I have also learned that we can all learn from one another and listening is an important communication skill to have!

Similarly, P7 concluded, “As a teacher, I think this assignment has caused me to be aware of the diversity in the school system.” Similarly, P11 also stated, “I know that if I have a student that doesn’t know language I will have to be very patient. What I’ve learned will help me as a developing teacher because I will be more cautious of how I approach students in my class from different cultures. I will also do research on my students’ culture before I have them in class, if I know I will be getting that student.” And P14 said, “It will help me to have a better understanding of what a student would be experiencing while trying to function and learn in a classroom when English is not their first language.” Another student wrote, “This can help me in the classroom, by being more open to the fact that many of my students come from different backgrounds. I want to learn about them, in a similar way I learned about Alex's culture. I think that this is important to show your student's that you care about them, and this is a great way to do so. I am very grateful for this experience and have made a wonderful friend from it. Thank you for the opportunity.”

Other meaningful learning. As is always the case with qualitative responses, some do not fall neatly into categories. Still, researchers want to capture rich data which helps address the research questions.

One American student expressed metacognitive notions about teaching because of her partnership. She wrote, “Sometimes the student is a visual learner, sometimes a hearing learner and sometimes a physical learner. I learned that sometimes you need to implement a game to

understand certain topics a student understands. Lastly, I learned that with a communication barrier sometimes, one must draw pictures so the student can understand what you are talking about.”

Partner 5 had reflections of a different vein. “The sensitivity such partnership programs can support is highly critical for creating a better educational environment in countries like the U.S., which is experiencing drastic changes in students’ demographic in recent years. This clearly constitutes some cultural motivation for American community while dealing with diversity-related issues in schooling system and achieving a sounder self-criticism.”

Another partner stated, “I learned so much to help me as a developing teacher from this experience. I received hands on and one-on-one experience with a student where English is their second language. I have never been exposed to that before and I am so grateful that I had the opportunity to do so. I learned how to help make someone feel comfortable with opening up to me about themselves which is a skill I must have as a teacher. I learned to be patient and let someone figure out things on their own that I could easily tell them the answer to.”

Another student responded, “On our last meeting, we exchanged gifts and I truly felt blessed to have been able to spend time with her. This turned out to be such a blessing to her and me. I thank you for making this opportunity available and for pairing the two of us together. I learned so much and I feel that I will be a much better teacher and person because of this experience.

Our favorite responses were those which showed learning way beyond the intents of the course, and the forming of lasting friendships. One partner wrote the following, which made all the effort in this study worthwhile. “In conclusion, I have made a true friend this semester and I couldn’t be happier. XXX and I value each other for who we are as individuals and we honor our friendship in the same fashion. I’ll miss him during the month that he will be spending in California, and even more when he graduates and moves back to Liberia. But for now I am satisfied

with what we have and I hope that the other students in this course love this project the way I have. Thanks again for this incredible opportunity, Dr. Kasten. It has and will continue to be one of the most genuine, meaningful endeavors of my life and I could not be more grateful.”

Discussion

This research is limited in terms of time length and number of participants. Because of this, making generalizations should be limited. While many of the partnerships ended up extremely positively, others were somewhat less enthusiastic, even if they realized the educational intent of the program. It should also be noted, that in the end, the quality of the data gathered from the American students was richer and with more depth than the data gathered from the international students which was limited to one survey. These limitations must be taken into consideration with this discussion.

International Students’ Perceptions

What we learned from international students was encouraging, but lacked depth. No one said they did not benefit, and so overall, we believe the program worked to their advantage. In retrospect, because their English proficiency varied greatly, conducting live interviews would likely have yielded more interesting responses. Nonetheless, the international students all reported positive outcomes for themselves with learning English, getting help on their school work, and in learning more about the U.S. and its people.

American students’ perceptions

At the beginning of the program, some of the U.S. students were skeptical about this assignment, and wondered about being required to do something that was unusual. Others welcomed the opportunity openly, stating that they had wanted to know more about international students, and really didn’t know how to go about doing so. Overall, the American student

perceptions were highly positive. They reported having their “eyes opened” to areas of diversity, about which they knew nothing prior to the course. They learned more about their own language, having that opportunity to look at it from someone else’s perspective, and they learned that having sensitivity towards other cultures would be a beneficial trait in a teacher. However, the instances where partners developed a lasting and meaningful friendship are probably the most important outcomes of this inquiry, although we will never know how these friendships develop and sustain themselves over time.

Recommendations for future conversation partnership programs

We have continued with this program in subsequent courses. Involving the international office more directly has had some benefits, as they provide the matching of partners, and they also offer a one-time orientation for everyone involved. One recommendation would be to link to the English courses in the ESL Center on campus, making a course requirement for both sets of the partnership. This might enable more collecting of data from the international students, as well as providing opportunities to link the topics discussed in partnership meetings with international students’ learning in their courses. Of course, not all international students are still enrolled in English classes, so linking the classes has limitations as well. Currently, because there are far more international students than classes committed to helping them, the international office has created little communities with one American student and two or three international students. However, not all groups are getting regular attendance from the international partners. This may not serve to build the kinds of good relationships we have observed in some of the partnerships.

Another recommendation we would offer, is to refrain from making the topics and requirements so scheduled or specific, that the schedules strangle the spontaneity and creativity that was observed in some partnerships. These trips to grocery stores, movies, and home are likely the

most memorable for international students and American students alike, and these experiences go a long way towards our goals. International students get more language and socialization opportunity; American students get more cultural experience.

Overall, we are committed to programs that foster global understanding between American and international students. We believe that programs like this make a considerable contribution to that goal.

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APPENDIX**International Conversation Partnership Survey Questions**

(before being put into *Qualtrics*)

Q1- What country are you from?

Q2- How many years have you been speaking English?

Q3- Do you consider yourself good at oral English? Why or why not?

Q4- Was this the first time you had a conversation partner?

Q5- How many times did you and your conversation partners communicate?

Q6- How did you and your conversation partner communicates?

Q7- Can you tell us what you think about having an American conversation partner?

Q8- Do you believe having a conversation partner was a benefit?

Q9- Do you think this experience helped you in your studies?

Q10- Do you think this experience helped you speaking in your daily life?

Q11- Could you tell us about your best experience with your conversation partner?

Q12- Could you tell us about your worst experience with your conversation partner?

Q13- What topics did you talk about?

Q14- What suggestions do you have for us to improve the program for future conversation partners?

Q15- What are your recommendations to future international students about conversation partners?

Q16- Is there anything else you would like to say about conversation partners?