



## Sharing language and cultural competence

### Abstract

One of the conference themes includes discussion around provision of services for students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. This necessitates programs which can help develop both language skills and cultural competence. Yates (2013, p. 1037) believes international students are motivated to improve their communication skills but not provided enough 'social integration initiatives', calling on universities to address this need in order to 'safeguard their lucrative overseas markets'. As she says, 'speaking skills will not develop by themselves'. Levis (2015, p. 42) agrees, suggesting 'in order to change, speakers need to speak to other people'. He found international students don't always understand the importance of social communication; believing for example, that good pronunciation is something they can 'catch' without the need for interaction. The need for sustained motivation by students is addressed by Oliver, Dooley & Rochecouste (2012) who agree that students need to step out of their comfort zone and engage in order to facilitate their language growth. This combination of language development, social integration and cultural competence has driven UTS HELPS to provide programs where international students can engage with volunteers in casual conversation. More than 300 volunteers engage in these programs each year to support over 800 international students. Volunteers are UTS students, staff and alumni. This year we have also begun a partnership with ABC with their employees matched up with UTS international students. This Pecha Kuch presentation will focus on a number of areas that were identified in both the Diversity/Inclusivity and Peer Learning themes: effectiveness and sustainability of our volunteer programs; defining the student/volunteer roles and training needs; innovation beyond the university into the alumni and workplace communities and challenges related to administration. Feedback from these programs over the last 3 years has highlighted both student and volunteer perceptions, closely aligned to Lee's 2016 paper.

### References

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- Yates, L. (2013), 'Challenges to Brand Australia: international students and the problem with Speaking', *Higher Education Research & Development*, vol. 32, no. 6, pp. 1037-50.