

Intensive Intercultural English Language for Enhanced School Community Engagement: An Exploratory Study Applied to Parents from Language Backgrounds Other Than English in a Regional Australian Primary School

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Abstract : Using standard Australian English with confidence is a cultural expectation of parents of primary school aged children who want to engage effectively with their children's teachers and school administration. That confidence in support of their children's learning at school is seldom experienced by parents whose first language is not English. Sharing language with competence in an intercultural environment is the common denominator for meaningful communication and engagement to occur in a school community. Experience in relevant interactive sessions is known to enhance engagement and participation. The purpose of this paper is to identify interactional settings for which parents who are isolated from the daily use of functional Australian cultural language learned to engage more effectively in their children's learning at school. The outcomes measured parents' intercultural engagement with classroom teachers and attention to the school's administrative procedures. The study used quantitative and qualitative methods. The principles of communicative task-based language learning combined with intercultural communication principles provided the theoretical base for intensive English task-based learning and engagement. The quantitative analysis examined data samples collected by classroom teachers and administrators and parents' writing samples. Interviews and observations qualitatively informed the study. Currently significant numbers of projects are active in community centres and schools to enhance English language knowledge of parents from Language Backgrounds Other Than English (LBOTE). The study was significant to explore the effects of conducting intensive English with parents of varied English language backgrounds by targeting language use for social interactions in the community, specific engagement in school activities, cultural interaction with teachers and responsiveness to complying with school procedures.

Keywords : engagement, intercultural communication, LBOTE, school community

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