INTRODUCTION TO ESL
STAFF SUMMARY FROM THE VIDEO ‘LINGO’

“The limits of my language are the limits of my world.”

Despite being proficient in the language of the playground and conversation, many second phase ESL students experience difficulties in other aspects of communication. What are these difficulties and what handicaps do ESL students face in trying to overcome them?

- They don’t talk smoothly, language can appear jerky
- Their language doesn’t flow – no connectives ie they find it hard to link information
- They are often perceived as a low achiever by teachers, other students and themselves
- Can be perceived as “dumb” when they aren’t!
- They can have difficulty expressing themselves
- They lack the skills in standard English eg that of news bulletins, essay writing etc. This is “the language of success”.
- It can be difficult for them to relate to other classmates and situations.
- They may not understand concepts
- They may perceive prejudice because they feel different
- They may experience fear and embarrassment which stops them from asking questions
- Language mistakes go unchecked at home as parents don’t recognise them. The students come to school thinking they are speaking correctly.
- They don’t have modality in their speech, therefore they may appear rude or aggressive in their expressions and language

During the video students gave suggestions about how teachers could help them or make it easier for them to learn. Which of these suggestions would be practical for use at HVGS? What additional suggestions do you have?

- Keep language basic, ie key words
- Break directions / instructions down
- Be approachable, make time to speak to the students out of class or after the lesson
- Book individual help times
- Build up word banks, identify key words
- Make the learning relevant / practical / relate to life experiences
- Modify work
- Provide more “talk time”
- Use of visual cues / “hands-on”
- Use of specialist teachers in the classroom, eg ESL
- Group work
- Allow students to practise using their language
- Expose students to others with a similar background
- Check language when parents are unable to give corrections
- Include other cultures in teaching programs, especially those of groups in the school
- When correcting work, provide examples of correct sentence structure rather than short, negative comments
- Support inservicing for teachers
- Share progress of students across the curriculum with peers
- Use pastoral activities for providing support
Consider the “Frog” lesson. How could the lesson have been adapted to provide more support for the ESL learner?

- Use visuals, e.g., poster
- Teacher to start by finding out what the students already know
- Give students key words – on the board and on paper
- Give definitions
- Make students involved, not passive, e.g., have games and activities
- Reinforcement by repeating terms, make a glossary
- Pronounce words
- Match words and definitions (game)
- Group work to read chapter and answer questions
- Teach parts first, the put together
- Involve students in labelling pictures
- Make time to spend in a one to one situation with the students

Because of their limited facility with English, ESL students may not have a grasp of the modality of English. What issues could this create for us as teachers and what strategies could we use?

Modality comes from the English word “mode” which means the “the proper and correct way in which things are done”.

Issues
- The students may not know the language required to be polite and thus they may offend
- Students could appear to be rude in class. This could create a problem with the rest of the class especially with an apparent, unintentional, disrespect for staff
- The student may seem abrupt and aggressive

Strategies
- Don’t over react – the rudeness is not usually intended
- Accept approximations then model appropriately
- Model correct modality
- Continue to model modality in your dealings with all students

The video showed the importance of past learning experiences on which to hang new information. “When all my pegs are unrecognised, unvalued and unmentioned, by implication, my past experience is worthless and so am I.”

What implications does this have for the teaching and learning process?
(The first part is from Nigel’s experience)

Nigel thinks we should include their history, culture, language, awareness of religion and past experiences. A need to be empathetic towards a different background and the way students may talk and respond.

- Group work breaks down barriers and can allow the use of their first language. It also enables risk taking.
- Self-esteem effects learning. Teachers can effect self-esteem “success breeds success”.
- Aim for cultural inclusivity in the classroom. We could put Korean flags in the school.
- Invite ESL students to be an “expert” on a particular topic
- Celebrate the differences in our cultures, beliefs and traditions, promote tolerance and understanding
- Seek information regarding the background of ESL students. Build a profile e.g., the language spoken at home, etc. in order to better understand where the student is at.
- Make use of literature originating from other countries
• Take time to network with other teachers to increase your repertoire of teaching strategies.
• Use culturally inclusive books and resources eg Con’s pet rabbit, Hassin’s Horses, How Tao learned to play soccer ....
• Teacher made resources can include the names of students

“Confusion and frustration as students drown in a sea of subject terminology.”
What can you do in your classroom to change this situation?
• Clarify the meaning of key words
• Write key words on the board for students to refer to
• Do lots of examples (individually if necessary) for those who need them
• Individual help and encouragement / ESL teacher assisting in the mainstream
• Small group work can help
• Task based teaching
• This is a whole school responsibility. All teachers take part!