

Buddy project

Lloyd Bethell M.A. Senior Lecturer

E-mail: lloyd.bethell@hamk.fi

HAMK - University of Applied Sciences

Abstract

Finnish society has a high number of people either retired or nearing retirement. Over the next 15 years this will reach a peak, which means that there will be a shortage of workers. The Finnish government started an initiative to encourage international students to study in this country with the aim of them staying and joining the workforce. To accomplish this many international degree programmes were initiated in universities of applied sciences (UASs) throughout Finland. However, it appears that most of the international students want to either return to their native countries or to an English-speaking country – Finland is only viewed as being a free educational gateway. So the original governmental idea and what the international students actually do after their education are not in line. This is a challenge for teachers – how to encourage international students to stay in Finland and become integrated into the community and workplaces.

So to meet this challenge a project was started in autumn 2008, between first-year, international, mechanical engineering students and Finnish, adult, evening mechanical and information technology engineering students. The aims of the project were the following:

- integration and familiarisation of local community for international students
- introduction to Finnish companies
- reduction of prejudices and stereotypes in Finnish workplaces
- possibility of Finnish language acquisition
- improvement of English communication skills
- multi-faceted communication in English (SMS, face-to-face, phone, email)
- multinational communication experience for Finns

The majority of the Finnish students were employed, which was seen as something that could be extremely beneficial for introducing the international students to the Finnish workplace and for Finnish workplaces to experience international students.

Both groups had tasks to perform during the project. Focus was placed on communication and organisation of meetings, etc. Every adult student was expected to conduct a tour of their workplace (if possible) and to conduct a simulated job interview with the international student as the job applicant. Both groups had to write a final report of the interview and experiences of the project.

Despite some minor problems, the overall experience was positive. Some concrete results were obtained: friendships, possible summer workplaces and continued contact after the project.

Based upon these experiences, the project is being redeveloped this autumn (2009). Moodle 1.9.x is being used as an interface for the students to contact each other. Students will be expected to either write a learning diary or a blog of their experiences. It is hoped that through Moodle some of the communication problems will be minimised and the lecturers can follow and facilitate the process.