

Educational Design for Cross-Cultural Exchange Abroad: An EFL-FD Perspective

海外における相互文化交流の教育計画－ EFL - FDの視点

Margaret M. Chang

東北芸術工科大学で英語を履修する学生のほとんどは、国際交流の場で、特に海外に行った時に英語でコミュニケーションができるようになることを目標としている。この目標を念頭に置き、この論文では本学におけるEFL（外国語としての英語教育）のプログラムのカリキュラム開発を考察した。

現在及び現在にいたるまでのプログラムの理論や有効性を踏まえながら、今後のプログラムの修正または改善への提言をしていきたいと思う。理論に偏りすぎないように、コミュニケーション能力の4要素に基づいて実用的な分析をした。

以下のような方法で、この研究がFD (Faculty Development) の効果を高めることを望みたい。

- (1) 新任の英語教師や他の外国語の先生方に、現在のこのようなプログラムになるに至った経緯を理解してもらう。
 - (2) 芸工大の他の科目の先生方に、現在の英語教育プログラムのねらいや目標を理解してもらう。そして大学全体として意思疎通を図り、より質の高い一般教養科目学習の機会を学生達に提供できるようにうにする。
 - (3) 同様のプログラム開発を行っている他大学のEFLの先生方にも、本学での取り組みを知っていただき、体験を共有する。
 - (4) 大学内で、または他大学も交え、プログラムについての反省及び討論の機会を増やしたい。
- それが、より効果的なプログラムを企画し、開発していくための一つの方法である。

そしてこのプログラムによってこそ、英語でのコミュニケーション能力が要求される異文化間交流の場に、学生達が自信を持って参加できるようになるであろう。

Introduction

In the study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) field, the ultimate goal of most students is for international cross-cultural exchange - for travel, academic study, professional exchange of research and information, among others. This is no less true for students at our university, the Tohoku University of Art and Design (TUAD). Unfortunately, after six years of English study in junior and senior high school, few students in Japan enter university with adequate communicative English skills to be able to meaningfully participate in cross-cultural exchange. Reasons such as large class size, little contact with native speakers, few real opportunities to practice the target language, and the necessity of preparing for the high school and university entrance exams, which are largely grammar-based with little focus on testing communicative ability, have all been cited.

It has been said that teaching is an art that requires great insight and creativity in order to be effective. The same is true of language as a form of communicative expression. Insight, creativity, originality, spontaneity, adaptability - all qualities needed in order to be a good teacher as well as a good communicator - cannot be taught through only structured rules, set patterns, and rote drilling and memorization. In EFL teaching, then, educational design is an essential consideration necessitating ongoing research and evaluation. The interaction between learner

needs and the learning environment, which are in constant flux, must be taken into consideration and continually re-evaluated. In this paper, the English program at TUAD is analyzed using information from EFL research. Educational practices in the past and present are examined in order to propose changes for the future that can enable learners to practice and acquire skills necessary for natural communication in the real world.

Project X: The Vision

There is a television series called Project X that highlights historical developments and inventions. It is inspiring in that it illustrates on a human level the hardships faced by the pioneers as they struggled to realize their vision – the repeated failures and disappointments that blocked their path, the determination and faith in their vision required to continue, and finally the exhilaration of success in overcoming the various unforeseeable difficulties.

I, too, have a vision, a Project X: to design and develop an English program at our university that would provide the needed resources and experience to support students' learning – a program that would enable them, after seriously applying themselves, to reach a high enough level of communicative competence to be able to interact confidently in English with visitors to Japan, or for travel and study abroad.

Towards this goal, I envision the presence of an adequate number of full-time staff of caring teaching professionals who would be responsible for regular classes as well as advising and tutoring students with special needs or requests. **Full-time teachers** are needed to attend regular meetings to share information about students and the program, participate in teacher-training

or faculty development (FD) workshops for their own continuing education, prepare common lesson and testing materials, provide individual mentoring and independent study classes. Part-time positions cannot meet such program and student needs since teachers are unavailable to work towards a unified, coordinated program.

Besides human resources, access to a well-equipped **language laboratory** (LL) is necessary for students to get supplementary practice and drilling, especially in listening, reading, grammar and vocabulary building. This is especially true for English as a *foreign* language situations where the learner is not surrounded by English in daily life (as opposed to English as a *second* language, or ESL, where the learner is already living in an English-speaking society). Research has shown that meaningful interaction in the target language (also referred to as L2, which includes foreign as well as second language situations) is necessary to achieve communicative language ability (Ellis, 1986). In other words, *actual experience* in using the L2 is essential. Since EFL student have few opportunities for such interaction outside the classroom, the main portion of valuable lesson time should, ideally, focus on meaningful communication activities with vocabulary and sentence pattern drilling and memorization used for just warm-up and review. Well-developed computer-assisted language learning (CALL) software can provide the also necessary methodical repetition and basic grammatical practice for students in the LL, making more of the lesson time available and preparing students for free interactive language.

Opportunities to travel abroad further give students invaluable real language experience of a kind not duplicable in the classroom. Natural, live conversation is unscripted, and thus, unpredictable. This back and forth exchange and interaction of words like players in a tennis

match not knowing what kind of shot will be returned is characteristic of real conversation. Understanding comes from the development of the interplay of utterances between speakers. Communication has been defined as the "negotiation of meaning" (Savignon, 1983). The speaker's words are not received only as one-pattern-one-meaning. Nonverbal variables such as timing, context, intonation, degree of formality as determined by socio-cultural rules of language use all affect meaning and transmit information such as intent or emotion. Success in communication requires skill in understanding and using these nonverbal socio-linguistic elements, and the ability to anticipate the next "shot" in order to successfully manage the exchange or negotiate meaning. This skill can only be mastered through actual experience, most preferably in the L2 culture. Carefully planned **study tours** that could also be offered for course credit would give students the needed experience to develop the skills and ability to engage in real, spontaneous communication.

In the EFL classroom situation, **testing** is important for students by providing motivation and feedback for their learning, and for teachers by measuring student progress and mastery of key lesson concepts. Since testing method and content reflect what the teacher considers to be important learning goals, it would be a great contradiction to have only simple multiple-choice written tests in an English program that stressed spoken fluency. Such tests cannot measure students' communicative ability as accurately as tests that require students to engage in actual conversation. Speaking tests are rare in typical university EFL classes due to budget and time constraints and difficulty in constructing, administering, and grading, which all require teacher-training. However, their benefits make them worthy of serious consideration and

adoption in an effective EFL program. With the cooperation and support of a full-time teaching staff, standardized program-wide conversation testing could be used as an effective teaching and learning tool.

Communicative Competence

Almost all foreign language students and teachers alike agree that communicative ability in the L2 is a desired goal. However, many have difficulty describing "communicative" ability or competence. What is it? How can it be defined? How can teachers actually measure whether a student has communicative competence (CC) or not? What key points should be looked for? If only grammar study is not enough for being able to achieve CC, what other skills must be taught? Must speaking be involved in order for an activity to be considered communicative? These are questions that have crossed the minds of all foreign language educators and researchers.

In order to effectively design a foreign language program that can bring students to adequate communicative fluency for international exchange, this desired ability or competence as a goal must be clearly identified and defined. The following four-point model of communicative competence, which was first proposed by Hymes (1971) and then developed further by Canale and Swain (1980; also in Savignon, 1983), is used as a basis in educational design considerations in EFL program planning and evaluation at this university.

1. *Grammatical Competence*: This component of communicative competence is most familiar and obvious to anyone studying or teaching a foreign or second language. It involves the structural rules of language, and is the only component of CC that is amenable to drilling and memorization.

Because of this component's mechanical characteristic, it is often mistaken as the opposite of communication — that "grammatical" equals "non-communicative." However, grammatical accuracy, at least to a certain degree, is necessary to communicate successfully; thus, in this model of CC, grammar is viewed as part of communication rather than its antithesis.

The following is a case in point. One of my students who had not completely mastered the basic subject-verb-object grammar pattern of English in conversation produced the sentence, "This cake eat me" (which would have been grammatical word order in Japanese). What he had wanted to say was "I eat this cake." It is obvious from this example that competency in grammar is a basic necessity in being able to communicate effectively.

2. Sociolinguistic Competence: This is the ability to communicate appropriately according to the social rules of the community in which the target language is used, such as polite versus familiar, or direct versus indirect speech. Unlike grammatical competence which focuses on the accuracy of the sentence structure, sociolinguistic competence involves the manner in which meaning is conveyed. It must take into account the relation between the speakers and the situational context in which the language is spoken.

For example, students who forget to bring their handout from the previous lesson will sometimes approach me during the class to ask for another handout by saying, "One paper please" or "Please give me a paper." Perhaps this would be an acceptable form of request in Japanese, but, to my sense in English, this request was stated in a socially inappropriate manner. The student seems rude and presumptuous to ask the professor for a replacement handout in the form of a command when the student, was already in the wrong to

not have come to class prepared with his handout from the last lesson. In this case, the student should be taught to make his request more politely by asking, "Could I have another paper, please?" He could also add an apology and excuse as to why he didn't bring his original paper. The request for another paper could also be stated more indirectly such as, "Do you have any extra handouts?" "Give me a paper" and "Could I have a paper?" are both grammatically correct sentences, but in a real communication situation, would certainly elicit different responses from the listener and perhaps get different results for the speaker, especially if he were in need of help.

3. Discourse Competence: This is the ability to grasp the underlying or deep meaning (what is meant) from the surface structure (what is said). This involves being able to understand the whole from the sum of the parts while taking into consideration the background, context, and relational situation between interlocutors. The ability to draw accurate conclusions and make correct interpretations are examples of discourse competence. Misunderstandings are often a result of a gap in discourse between the speaker and listener with the speaker's intent being understood or taken the wrong way by the listener. The listener might have focused or placed greater weight on a different part of the conversation and come up with a different conclusion or understanding than what the speaker originally intended. Another factor could be that of speaker and listener entering into the conversation with different assumptions. Cases of "I understand the words you are saying but don't know what you are talking about" are instances of a lapse in discourse.

Understanding humor is another area that requires discourse competence. Catching key words or phrases, knowing about double

meanings of words and expressions, and having enough background information to make accurate deductions and guesses enable the listener to understand and appreciate the subtle nuances and play on words usually involved in puns and jokes. Becoming competent in discourse is similar to acquiring competence in other skills such as driving or playing tennis. The driver or athlete makes use of his range of experience to accurately judge the driving or playing conditions in order to successfully manage or navigate the course by being prepared to anticipate next obstacle or return shot. Discourse competence develops from experience in order to be able to make accurate assumptions; it requires skill in discerning the key points or extrapolating the main idea from the total of what was said, the ability to restate or rephrase to check for accuracy of understanding, among others.

A very simple example of discourse competence often occurs in supermarket checkout counters in the U.S. In many stores, shoppers are often asked by the cashier, "Paper or plastic?" Shoppers unfamiliar with stores that give customers a choice of paper or plastic bags in response to environmental concerns would have trouble understanding the meaning of the question or the necessity of such a choice. Some have mistakenly understood the question to mean "Cash or charge?" In this case, experience is needed for understanding, not grammar or vocabulary study. Similarly, in Japanese convenience stores, shoppers who buy food items such as 'onigiri' (rice ball) or 'obento' (boxed lunch) are often asked a question by the clerk at the register. Those already familiar with this scenario would soon be able to guess what the clerk asked ("Would you like me to heat this?") In this case, quick understanding or good listening comprehension is greatly influenced by experience with the situation rather than vocabulary practice.

A final example of discourse competence would be the following: the speaker asks, "Are you busy Friday night? Do you like sushi?" In the grammar class devoid of communicative context, these sentences, according to their surface structure, would be taken simply as factual yes-no questions about the listener's schedule and dietary preferences. However, in a real communicative situation, the deep structure or intended meaning in conversation for the combination of the two sentences could be taken to mean, "Would you like to have sushi with me on Friday night?" Ability to accurately understand the speaker's meaning is the basis of discourse competence. This involves linguistic insight or the ability to "read between the lines" for the purpose or intent of the utterances based on experience and fluency with contextual and situational cues and background experience.

4. *Strategic Competence*: In speaking, as in driving, there are many ways to get to the same destination. In communication, the route that the speaker chooses and the methods he employs to overcome obstacles along the way are part of strategic competence. For example, the student may not know the exact vocabulary word in the L2 for what he wants to communicate. He might then use strategies to compensate for the lack, such as gestures, approximations ("It's like a ..."), substitutions, simplifications, or negations ("I am very unhappy" for "I am frustrated" or "I am disappointed"), eliciting help from the listener ("How do you say..." or "What's it called when..."). Conversely, in listening, possible strategies might be asking for a definition ("What's a..." or "I don't know the meaning of..."), requesting an example ("Could you give me an example of what you mean"), rephrasing to check comprehension ("So, in other words, ..."). Strategic competence enables the student to continue conversation despite

roadblocks or obstacles.

On a broader conversational scale, socio-cultural as well as linguistic situations include communicating needs or preferences, requesting help, apologizing, extending or declining an invitation, expressing appreciation, giving an opinion, and more. Strategic competence is needed to carry out these tasks smoothly and successfully. For example, in giving an opinion, the speaker must use strategies such as deciding what supporting information to include and what to leave out, providing the reasoning or rationale for his view, and arranging information for clarity and effect. The know-how for selecting and employing appropriate and effective communication strategies comes from experience and familiarity with the culture and society, and is needed in order to be able to anticipate or project how the situation may play out, especially as influenced by interpersonal and socio-cultural variables.

Towards the Vision

English Program: *The Past*

In the process of designing an improved program, past program framework and practices must be reviewed and analyzed for educational value and effectiveness. Reflecting on where we have been will guide our steps for future improvements and help us avoid repeating past mistakes. The initial program was a kind of utopia in the sense that its basis was that of freedom from any program rules, standards, and exam pressures – very different from the junior high and high school situations where the course of study, textbooks, and progress schedule are predetermined by the Ministry of Education with the goal for English study for many students being that of passing the entrance exam.

Although students were free to choose among

five different foreign languages (Chinese, English, French, German, and Russian), they were required to earn two years of foreign language credit in order to graduate. A majority of students selected English. Classes were divided as first-, second-, and third-year English classes according to the student's year of study in the university. There were no fourth year classes since it was assumed that students would have completed their foreign language requirement by then and would be busy preparing for graduation. English class size averaged from 35 to 40 students. Students were free to choose any combination of two English classes, each held once per week, with students having a total of two English lessons per week. Although each class was, in effect, independent of the other since the teachers did not share teaching materials nor lesson plans, the student received only one grade for the two classes of English. This was calculated by taking the average of the two grades initially given for the two classes.

This free system of study was, ideally, believed to be in the best interest of students and teachers. It gave students freedom to choose the teacher, topic, and lesson style that they preferred and the combination of classes that best fit their time schedule. Teachers were free to select any lesson content and teaching method they preferred according to their interests and special abilities. Perhaps it was originally believed that giving teachers such freedom would take advantage of each one's unique strengths and area of expertise, thus creating a strong program. Some teachers focused on grammar, others on speaking, and others on reading and listening comprehension. Some used textbooks, others magazines and newspapers, and others their own original materials. Standards and method of evaluating students were also left open for each individual instructor to decide. There could be a final

research paper or presentation, written test, or nothing at all.

At a glance, this free and open system seemed to be a refreshing and needed change from the restrictive secondary school system that has often been blamed for students' lack of communicative competence after six years of English study. Teachers could decide what and how to teach, and students, although initially motivated to study by the two-year foreign language requirement, could at least select their own desired combination of classes; and if they did not like English, they had four other foreign languages from which they could choose. However, after a few semesters of teaching and learning with this system, its limitations and drawbacks became more and more apparent.

First, the practice of not separating students into classes according to their level of English ability rather than automatically by their year of university study was questioned. After all, not all freshmen had the same level of English ability. Regardless, arguments against having graded levels persisted, including foremost, that lower level students would be demoralized at having been labeled so. Another concern voiced was that a system of separating students according to levels based on English ability would introduce a kind of class system and might become a basis for discrimination against lower level students. Further, proponents for keeping the status quo pointed out that the mixed-level classes encouraged students to interact by creating a need for higher level students to help the lower level students; the helping students benefitted from the experience by reinforcing their learning; students who received help benefitted by receiving on-the-spot peer tutoring.

Over time, the severity of the problems created by mixed-level classes overshadowed the supposed benefits of continuing such a system.

Lesson planning posed an ongoing dilemma for teachers who could not teach to the needs of all the learners in the class. The advanced students were held back by lessons that did not intellectually challenge or stimulate them. More basic level students were often overwhelmed and discouraged by lessons and assignments that were too difficult for them. Rather than fostering a learning environment that encouraged students to support each other's learning, the mixed-level situation created stress and antagonism against students who could not keep up and thus became unmotivated and uninterested in the lesson, sometimes refusing to take part in the pairwork or group activities. Fearing that the lesson might be too difficult and confusing, the teacher would begin teaching more and more towards the lower levels creating a downward spiral as more advanced students became bored while the basic students continued to struggle to keep up with hit-or-miss lessons that could not give them the regular ongoing remedial help that they needed.

Since classes were not arranged by level of study, students could not progress step by step from semester to semester. Depending on the teacher, a class could be too difficult one semester, and too easy the next. There was no standardized final exam so that students could measure their own progress. With the class content, level, and material being determined by each individual teacher, there could be no logical course of study for students to follow. As the teachers changed for the students each semester, the curriculum changed. This teacher-based system resulted in teachers negatively competing against each other since students' English class selection was based not on level or content, but on teacher popularity. Teachers did not share teaching ideas and materials since they might have the same student. Each of the classes came to be known as Teacher X's class, or Teacher Y's class rather than the

formal course title which was simply, for example, "Ia" to indicate "freshman class, section a" or "IIf" for "sophomore English, section f." The result of this free system was that overlaps and gaps occurred in the students' study. Some students who were serious about preparing for study abroad were frustrated by the ineffectiveness of this system in improving their English skills. A few even elected to study at commercial English language conversation schools in hopes of truly being able to improve their communicative ability.

Ironically, although there were six full-time teachers for English at that time compared to the present number of two, no regular overall interaction, communication, goal-setting, and planning occurred among them concerning students and the program. This was not because that teachers were unmotivated, but that the overly autonomous system based on teacher individuality and uniqueness in order to offer a variety of lesson types and content did not encourage exchange among the teachers. Although each teacher may have worked very hard to design and develop his or her own class syllabus and lesson materials, the lack of program coordination did not provide a progressive continuation of study for students from one semester to the next.

As mentioned earlier, in the free system, students could select a combination of two independent classes taught by different teachers, yet received only one grade. At that time, the university grading system was based on a point scale with 100 being a perfect score and below 60 being a non-passing grade. This especially posed a problem when there was a large discrepancy in grades between the two classes. Suppose a student performed well in one class but did poorly in the other. His receiving a passing or failing grade often depended on a lucky combination of teacher's use of the grading scale of 0 to 100. For

example, if the student received a combination of 80 (pass) in one class and 50 (non-pass) in another, he would still get an averaged passing grade of 65 for the two classes for the semester. However, if the teacher in the second class happened to use 0 rather than 50 to indicate the non-pass, the student's averaged grade would be 40 and he would have failed both classes for the semester. Further, some teachers used increments of 10 in their grading (i.e., 60, 70, 80, 90) while others used increments of 5 or 1. Consider the following combination of grades: 65 and 55 (pass), but 64 and 55 (non-pass); 65 and 59 (pass), but 65 and 50 (non-pass). In each case, the first grade is passing while the second is non-passing. However, it is evident from these examples that whether or not a student would receive credit for an entire semester of English depended on luck of how his teachers used the grading scale. In response to this problem that occurred when there was a discrepancy in grades, the system was modified to giving the student an "Incomplete" or "Pending" grade when the averaged grade for the combination of "pass" and "non-pass" resulted in a "non-pass." The student was then allowed to make up the non-passed class credit, usually by taking another teacher's class for that year level. However, this solution also had its own complications. In the end, it was concluded that the best solution was to discontinue the practice to counting two separate classes as one in the name of giving students variety and freedom of choice.

Although "free" is often equated with "communicative" as suggested in the oft-used phrase "free conversation," past experience has shown that a system of *laissez faire* in an EFL program that seeks to develop communicative competence does not work. Letting students and teachers do as they choose in absence of a well-coordinated curriculum and program-

wide standards only results in frustration and stress for both students and teachers who are committed to the goal of learner communicative competence. Overall interaction, goal-setting, planning, evaluation of effectiveness, and ongoing communication is required among teachers concerning the English program.

The Present

In learning as well as teaching, mistakes are best viewed as learning opportunities. It is true that without mistakes, one would never learn. Overly serious students often hesitate to speak for fear of making mistakes. I often encourage them with the reminder that "mistakes are the best teachers." In this sense, the mistakes made in the past program were a necessary and valuable learning opportunity for teachers to discover the areas of discrepancy between theory and practice as well as to know the special needs of students at this university. What theoretically seemed to be a good system for encouraging and enabling students to improve greatly turned out to be ineffective in actual practice. Good teachers are researchers as well as practitioners, able to reflect on their teaching to bring results of their ongoing classroom-based research to beneficial use in their practice. Through experience with the freedom afforded by the original program, I was able to experiment with many teaching methods and materials that gave me invaluable insight for further program development and improvement.

The first area of change was to give a placement test to separate students into four levels: Basic, Elementary, Intermediate, and Advanced. The test is given during orientation at the beginning of the school year. Students must take the test to be placed in the appropriate level in order to register for English. Basic level English classes review grammar and sentence structures studied in junior and senior high school. Although fluency

activities are included, the focus of the lesson is to give students a solid working knowledge and familiarity with basic English grammar and vocabulary from which they can then begin to build conversation. Elementary level classes give practice with basic conversational phrases and patterns within common daily situations. Although the focus is still mainly on developing grammatical competence, the other competencies – sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence are introduced within the context of the practice dialogue. At this level, functional grammar usage is the main objective of the lesson. In Intermediate English, practice dialogues are longer with more focus placed on discourse compared to the the first two levels; practice activities shift more towards productive than receptive tasks requiring the learner to create original expressions in conversation. Fluency and various ways of expressing the same idea are stressed. Finally at the Advanced level, students are expected to use English to analyze and discuss various topics. The focus is on getting information and expressing their own ideas and opinions in English, which require use of discourse and, especially, strategic competence.

In the change from the old to the new system, classes were divided into two types – Skills and Topic – to make the transition less abrupt. Skills classes were offered for the Basic through Intermediate levels (Levels 1 through 3) and taught twice per week by the same teacher. Topic classes were given at the Intermediate and Advanced levels (Levels 3 and 4) and held once per week. Although all classes shared the same goal of improving students' skill in English, Topic classes were similar to classes in the former free system in that the subject, materials, and method of evaluation were decided by the individual teacher. We are currently in the process of phasing out the Intermediate level Topic classes. Beginning

last year, TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) preparation classes were offered at the Advanced level in response to requests by advisors and their students seeking to study abroad.

An EFL textbook-workbook series is used by all teachers in the Skills classes. With the use of a common textbook, students are able to progress through a logical step-by-step course of study from one semester to the next. Since the curriculum is no longer dependent on the teacher, students can be assured of being able to advance progressively through the program regardless of which teacher's class they register for. This unified system results in teacher cooperation instead of competition. Teachers using the same level textbook can discuss student progress and the effectiveness of certain activities in the textbook, and share supplemental lesson and homework materials and ideas. Compared to the past, the current system of using a professionally designed textbook series ensures fewer gaps and jumps in the students' course of study.

At the end of the semester, students take a common final exam to measure their mastery of skills and concepts studied. This test is designed through collaborative efforts of all the teachers for each of the three skills levels. In developing the final exam, each teacher contributes test questions to the editor-teacher for that semester who proofreads and checks the test for overall balance making sure that there are no problems such as unequal assignment of points for similar types of questions, or that the answer for a question submitted by one teacher appears in the dialogue created by another teacher in another part of the test. After checking the content, the editor-teacher does layout and then makes an original draft for all the submitting teachers to check before final copies are made. In this new standardized system, all English students take the same exam at the same time, regardless of which teacher they have.

As can be seen from this process of final exam development and administration, fair program standardization requires time, commitment, and cooperation from the teachers involved. However, the benefits gained for students in terms of learning value as well as for teachers in terms of professional development make the effort worthwhile.

Besides the final exam development, teachers must also meet and communicate regularly each semester to set grading standards, evaluate effectiveness of current program and materials, discuss possible changes, and set future goals. Last year, several faculty development (FD) workshops were conducted to study key topics of interest including classroom management ideas, effective use of the textbook, making practice activities communicative, and testing. EFL teachers from outside our university also participated in the workshops. Participants appreciated and benefitted from the opportunity for professional networking and to exchange teaching concerns, ideas, and experiences. Possible future FD workshop topics include incorporating the TOEFL or TOEIC (Test Of English for International Communication) into the EFL program, making the transition from practice activities to real communication, and conversation testing. The area of testing is a topic of particular interest to teachers in the present program, especially since final exam results have indicated a gap between study and mastery as evidenced by students' test performance. It has been suggested that the final exam be prepared at the beginning rather than the end of the semester to help bridge the gap between lesson focus and exam questions. However, it could be argued that doing so might also lead to teachers teaching towards the test items rather than for broader English skills development. This would be an interesting topic to explore in future FD meetings

and research.

More accurate placement of students into the appropriate levels is another topic for future FD research. Multiple choice tests are easiest to grade but cannot accurately measure students' productive language ability. Short essay questions were included in the past tests, but were very time-consuming to evaluate. Much time is required to train the teachers so that there would be inter-rater reliability or consistency of scoring among the teachers. Given the limited number of teachers who are available to grade the essays and the fact that test results have to be tabulated and submitted to the academic office on the very same day that the tests are administered to students, the placement test has always been a part of the program that calls for further re-evaluation and improvement. To ensure that students are in the level best suited to their ability, adjustments are permitted for students to move up or down a level after consulting with the teacher.

The past problem of discrepancy in grades between two different teachers was solved in the new system since the present Skills classes are taught twice per week by the same teacher. Additionally, the university grading system was changed to letter grades S, A, B, C, and F which would be 100-90, 89-80, 79-70, 69-60, and 59-0, correspondingly, in the former system. The new system of letter grades effectively eliminates the problem of ambiguity and unfairness in grading caused by inconsistency among different teachers in their individual use of the the range of points. Under this new system, as with many universities in the United States, a grade-point average (GPA) is calculated for students for all the grades earned throughout their academic study in university. Each letter is assigned one point with S being 4 points and F being 0. To further reduce the possibility of different class policies creating

unfairness in grading for students, a program standard of allowing no more than six absences for passing a class was decided. Students who miss more than six classes are not allowed to take the final exam. Also, tardiness is noted when the student is more than ten minutes late for class; three "lates" are counted as one "absent." Finally, grade weight is assigned to the various components of the course with the final exam being worth 40%, homework and quizzes 30%, and attendance and participation 30% of the total score. Since students earn grades according to effort in class as workers earn a salary for effort given to their jobs, consistency and fairness in evaluation and grading warrant utmost consideration in program planning and design.

The present system is far from perfect. There are still many areas that need further evaluation and improvement. Learner needs also change with time. Nevertheless, it can be safely said that the changes that have been made from the original system so far have all been steps in the right direction. There had been initial concern that program standardization would restrict teachers' creativity, reduce student motivation, and bring about problems that inhibit development of communicative competence reminiscent of secondary school English education. However, as we have seen in the past six years since placement testing was first instituted, eventually leading to all teachers using the same textbook series in Skills classes beginning four years ago, standardization promotes quality and encourages cooperation and support among teachers and students. Just as societies and businesses in globalizing have found that the benefits of cooperation and quality standardization far outweigh those of isolated independence and freedom without responsibility, we too have experienced the merits of a well-coordinated EFL program in which teachers are brought together

inter-dependently towards the common goal of excellence in education for our students.

The Future

It is envisioned that in the future, there will be enough students at the advanced level to be able to offer various classes to develop not just English skills, but also survival skills for study abroad such as information-getting, socializing, letter-writing, academic writing, interview preparation, presentation skills, note-taking and study skills, homestay manners, and the like. The focus of such classes would be to develop and refine students' expressive skills, that is, speaking and writing. Although the Basic through Intermediate level classes also aim to develop students' expressive ability, their primary goal, especially in the Basic and Elementary levels, is to assure a firm grasp of English grammar and key vocabulary. This grammatical competence is an essential base on which the other competencies – sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic—are then built.

The following chart shows how the four areas of reading, writing, listening and speaking are related in terms of the functions of expressive/receptive and auditory / visual skills:

	expressive	receptive
auditory	speaking	listening
visual	writing	reading

In larger class sizes of thirty to forty students as found in the secondary schools, lessons tend to rely heavily on receptive language skills – listening and reading. Activities such as listening to a taped conversation or reading a passage, and then selecting the correct answer are common ways of teaching and testing. Although receptive skills are essential in the process of communication, teaching solely towards these skills will not effectively carry over into the development of expressive skills. In other words, practice in only reading and listening will not

improve speaking and writing skills. Physiological support for this is found in the fact that the centers for language reception and expression are located in different areas of the human brain. With this awareness, teachers must be careful to design lessons that give students adequate practice. Further, **methods of testing and evaluation of expressive language skills** must be developed in expressive tasks.

Classes that have the goal of bringing students to expressive language fluency should, ideally, be small so that the teacher is able to monitor and give feedback. In small classes, teachers can truly come to know each student's areas of strength and weakness. However, in a program with over 400 students, 30 to 40 teachers would be needed to provide all students with such personalized lessons and advising. Since this is not feasible, **small-sized special needs classes** should first be provided for students who do not fit into the mainstream program, specifically, those needing extra remedial help to catch up and those who are especially advanced needing an accelerated class. If the number is too small to form a class, students could be offered **independent study** with a teacher as advisor-consultant. The vision for the **accelerated class** is similar to a sub-program of immersion in English—that is, the student would be immersed in English only during the lesson time which would be longer and/or more frequent than the regular classes during the semester. In addition, intensive classes such as an English camp could be offered between terms that would allow students a week, for example, of living and learning English experientially.

Small classes that give students more one-to-one interaction with the teacher so that attention and correction can be given to each individual student's error patterns are needed to develop communicative competence in the expressive skills of writing as well as speaking.

Communicative ability is often equated with speaking ability. However, writing is also a very important skill that students need to have, especially in the process of preparing for and then actually studying or working abroad, for example, in an essay for exchange program application, a letter to request information, or a research paper for class. Depending on the situation, the vocabulary and expressions that are used for the written mode can be different from those used for the spoken mode, and, thus, require sociolinguistic competence. Effective writing also depends heavily on the other competencies. Grammatical competence is needed especially since mistakes are more obvious in writing than in speaking; discourse competence because the written mode is not as instantaneous as the spoken mode – in other words, writing does not allow as many chances for back and forth interaction between sender and receiver as speaking – to be able to fine tune the message or check for misunderstandings; and strategic competence in composing the essay or letter for ease of understanding and proper tone (for example, does the writer seem too demanding or overly direct, is the writer's position or rationale logical or believable?) Inclusion of a good **written composition curriculum** is an area that cannot be overlooked in the development of an effective EFL program that seeks to prepare students for cross-cultural exchange and is another of the future goals envisioned for the program future goals.

Content classes that offer students at the higher levels topics such as Communication Studies or Global Studies taught completely in English is another future goal. As students' abilities increase, they need to learn more than grammar, vocabulary, and formulaic sentence patterns. Skills such as discussion and negotiation based on situation and culture are also necessary. Background knowledge about different social

and economic systems and current events will be essential for students in real-life communication situations. Global issues would include topics such as war and peace, history, environment (concepts of limited resource, decision-making), trade and economics; cultural studies would introduce concepts such as values, culture shock, stereotyping and discrimination, and skills such as analytical and critical thinking, information getting and processing. It is hoped that eventually, even classes in the students' own major subjects could be offered in English, for example, in a special class taught by a visiting professor from a university abroad with which we have educational exchange.

As aforementioned, last year a class in preparation for the TOEFL was offered. We would like to include the TOEIC for students whose future plans include the use of English in their career. In the 2004–'05 school year, our university administered the TOEFL ITP (Institutional Testing Program) for our advanced students. Through such standardized tests as the TOEFL or TOEIC, students could chart their progress and measure their ability with an internationally recognized standard. Their score could be used for reference or in actual application and preparation for study or work at home or abroad. In either case, it is expected that introduction of this class and testing service will prove to be motivational for English students.

With the current number of only two full-time teaching faculty, it is almost impossible to even consider testing students' speaking ability on a program-wide scale. However, conversation testing would be a more valid method of evaluating students' communicative competence both for more accurate placement into the level best suited to their ability and for final exam purposes. It certainly stands to reason that students should be tested in the actual skill that is being taught

towards. Using a written test to evaluate spoken proficiency does not have much face validity. Program-wide **conversation testing** is envisioned as a near future goal. Currently, various forms of such testing are being experimented in individual classes, specifically, presentation format and impromptu role play between two students. The challenge is to develop a format and schedule that can accommodate a large number of students with consistency in evaluation results.

It is expected that time and experience in a coordinated English program will offer teachers enough insight and background knowledge to be able to develop **original EFL course materials** to meet the specific needs of students at this university. As the number of students who consider English to be important in their future study and work career increase, so will the number and variety of requests for classes that meet their changing needs. Assignments that require use of English in experiential project or field work, creating pamphlets or captions to describe their art or design concept or work for an exhibition, and giving presentations are among the ideas for special skills training in tasks that students face in real life at our university.

Experiential opportunities such as overseas study tours would further challenge and motivate students to bring their English ability up to par for communication on an international level. Students would benefit greatly from such an experience in terms of gaining invaluable English practice in the non-grammatical aspects of communication – that is, the sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies – in a way that could never be duplicated in a classroom lesson. Another example of such an experiential opportunity would be through the set-up and management of a **student-run international cooperative shop** that would offer sundry items such as stationery, trinkets, art and craftwork, and even

some sweets and coffee or teas from various countries around the world. Through the Internet, students could contact people in other countries interested in offering their products for sale at the cooperative shop. The vision for this shop is a kind of English version of Microsociety reported in *Time* news magazine (September 21, 1992) where elementary school students were motivated to study subjects such as math and social studies by being given the opportunity to "put the lessons to work." In the Microsociety school, students had traditional classes in the morning and then worked in their Microsociety in the afternoon where they used their math, English, other academic skills to run shops, banks, and other businesses. "They memorize multiplication tables not only to score well on problem sets but also so they can keep double-entry books, write checks, bill customers and complete financial audits... 'We're making learning real because kids in Micro believe they're living in a real world'" (p.53). In the same way, the student-run international cooperative shop could make English real for students who are living in a non-English speaking country.

All the future goals listed above depend on two factors: a reliable **full-time teaching staff** able to undergo training and ongoing professional development, and a **program coordinator** with a firm grasp of the vision who is able to bring the goals to reality. The university system also needs to be one that formally recognizes the role of the program coordinator as a necessary job function just as work as department chairperson or committee member is acknowledged or compensated. Without such formal recognition or incentive, it would be all too easy to regress back to the initial system of disorganization, isolation, and lack of accountability with each instructor creating his or her own curriculum and rules as he or she saw fit. As we have already seen in the past, allowing

such disunity in curricular programming would only be an educational disservice to our students. The duties of the coordinator would include providing leadership and initiative for program evaluation, revision, and ongoing improvement; planning meetings to keep lines of communication open among teachers to share information about students, program policy, and teaching methods; and encouraging faculty development by organizing functions and events to introduce new ideas, approaches, and technology in EFL education.

In a unified program many decisions such as textbook selection, student placement, exam development, grading standards, and more need to be made cooperatively among all teachers who would then agree to adopt the policies in their regular classroom management and practice. It would be the work of the coordinator to oversee such decision-making and to ensure that all teachers understood the educational rationale for such decisions in order for them to be able to accept and carry out the policies. Without such a process of cooperative decision-making that leads to support of common rules and standards, it becomes easy for teachers who fail to understand the importance of such rules to dismiss them as unnecessary. Without university support for a program coordinator to work towards such understanding and cooperation, the beginnings of a downward spiral leading towards erosion of standards of quality and fairness would surely take place.

It cannot be stressed enough that realization of the vision of an effective program that offers adequate educational support for students in their quest for communicative competence would be almost impossible without a committed full-time staff that is large enough to teach and advise the great number of students throughout the program. As a case in point, the average expected

number of students taking the placement test each year is approximately 500. The task of planning, preparation, administration, and evaluation for such a great number of test-takers is enormous. Yet the work has been and must be done as best as possible with the current limited number of two full-time teachers with help from available part-time teachers and a number of part-time helpers hired for the day. Support for developing facilities such as the language lab, or programming such as the written composition curriculum or workshops also requires more full-time attention and assistance.

Conclusion

Although a basic component in foreign language learning, only grammar explanations and sentence pattern drills are not enough to bring students to a communicative level of English ability. So much of communication depends on more than just **grammatical competence**; understanding and navigating the context in which ideas are being exchanged is essential. True communicative competence requires that students be able to grasp the situation at hand and use the appropriate level of speech or register such as polite or formal versus intimate or casual language, and be able to choose socially appropriate comments or topics within the context of the conversation (**sociolinguistic competence**). As a listener, they must also be able to comprehend the main point and purpose or intent of the speaker from the total parts of the conversation. As a speaker, they must be able to effectively and clearly communicate their point within the context and course of the conversation without appearing too abrupt or overly direct, or conversely, causing confusion or misunderstanding (**discourse competence**). Finally, the way the student goes about getting information, asking for clarification, reconfirming understanding, balancing and

adjusting the tone, mood, or nuance of the message — in other words, the "how-to's" within the unique context of each conversation — is also an important factor in actual communication (**strategic competence**). In the case of a student presentation, for example, demonstrating these four components of communicative competence would require that the student's speech be grammatically correct (grammar), that he be able to speak at an appropriate level of difficulty in terms of language and content for the audience (sociolinguistic), that the focus or topic of his presentation or speech be clear to the listeners (discourse), and that he be able to manage questions from the audience or effectively use visual aids such as diagrams, outlines, or glossary of key terminology to help convey his ideas (strategy).

Most Japanese students' junior and senior high school lessons have focused on receptive tasks such as listening, reading, and selecting true-false or multiple choice answers. Such activities offer a high level of teacher control and afford easy grading of students' responses as correct or incorrect. However, sufficient practice and evaluation in the **expressive or productive language skills** of speaking and written composition is a must for students wanting to communicate in the real world. Students who have not had enough practice in learning how to put their ideas efficiently into English, and experience managing the variability of expressions within the unique context of each natural conversation — either written or spoken — find that they cannot participate in an actual communication situation in English. Therefore, especially at the university level, students must be given opportunities for meaningful expressive language practice and feedback within the classroom lesson along with abroad **practical experience** or in real-life projects at home in Japan such as a student-run international cooperative shop requiring students

to use natural English and their other academic skills resourcefully and creatively. Only through such expressive communication and cross-cultural experiences, can students develop the language skills—especially in the three non-grammatical competencies— needed to enable them to truly participate in international exchange activities requiring English.

To realize this goal for the students' English study, a **program coordinator** and sufficient number of **full-time teaching staff** dedicated towards this vision is needed to work interdependently in the areas of student placement, teaching, evaluation, and special advising. In this future program, teachers would cooperate to address special student needs through development of an accelerated class, independent study, special coursebook materials, content or topic classes, written composition class, TOEFL-TOEIC preparation, conversation testing, and advise students for special projects and exchange opportunities.

The current "buzzword" or, in Japanese, "catchphrase" in university education is "FD." I, as with many other teaching professionals, had been "doing FD," long before the term "FD" was formalized. It is hoped that this paper will serve to help other teachers for FD in the following ways: for incoming English teachers and other foreign language teachers to know and understand how and why the current program came to be; for teachers in other fields at this university to understand the goals and purpose of the current English program in order to provide a better liberal arts or general education for our students through communication on a university-wide level; for EFL teachers in a similar process of program development and improvement in other schools to share and learn from our experience; and on all levels (program, intra-, and inter-university) to encourage discussion for ways

to design and develop a more effective program that will truly enable students to participate confidently in cross-cultural exchange requiring communicative competence in English.

As illustrated throughout this paper, the current situation, although much improved, is far from ideal. Such is reality. However, I can only continue to strive towards the ideal with the goal of crossing the finish line of my career in satisfaction of having attained the vision and, as in the television series, be able to conclude this Project X story with a happy ending. I invite other teachers to join me in dialogue in this quest.

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執筆者

Margaret M. Chang

教養部
General Education]

助教授
Associate Professor