

HE Matriculation to the Ivy League?

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HISTORY OF HOLISTIC ENGLISH

The seed of discontent with China's current English teaching pedagogy and methodology was planted in April 2002 at a Joint Venture Business Institute at the 4th tier Railroad College in the Wuchang District of Wuhan, Hebei Province. Germination began at a Joint Venture Business Institute at a 4th tier college later in September 2002 in Shanghai and was simultaneously watered at a Joint Venture program at another 4th tier college across town in Shanghai. The students lacked intrinsic motivation and the English programs were dull, boring and did not apply much in the way of extrinsic motivation. It was noted that both the Wuhan and Shanghai business institutes provided a free choice movie viewing room with an English movie library and large screen TV for viewing. It appeared that those few students who took advantage of this resource were making the most progress in their English development.

In November 2002 Holistic English started to incubate at a 3rd tier Agricultural College in Henan Province.¹

Refinement of the Holistic English Program began at Tong ji University, Shanghai, a 1st tier university, in March 2003; Shanghai Normal University, a 2nd tier university in March 2003 and simultaneously at a Joint Venture Business Institute at Shanghai Normal University; and a Joint Venture Business Institute at Shanghai University², a 2nd tier university, in September 2003.

Further refinement of the Holistic English Program occurred in 2004 in both the business department and the English department at Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics, Jiangxi Province, a 2nd tier university,

Then in 2005 the Holistic English Program returned to its original incubator at the 3rd tier agricultural college in Henan Province. From this home base the Holistic English Program was initiated, on an experimental basis, at Guangxi University, a 2nd tier university in Guangxi Province, Shenyang Normal University³, a 2nd tier university in Liaoning Province; Yang En University, a 2nd tier university in Fujian Province; Xinyang Normal University, a 2nd tier university in Henan Province; and Xinyang Vocational College, a 4th tier college in Henan Province.⁴

¹ (2004) Teng, Wolff, Qiang, Can You Get a First Class Education at a Third Tier College in China? Vol. 13 Progress in Education, Nova Science Publishers

² (2007) Wolff, Qiang Dissatisfied Customers: Chinese Business Institute Students Speak Out, Ch. 12 Frontiers in Higher Education, Nova Science Publishers.

³ (in press 2011) Roessler, Griggs Holistic English at a Joint Venture Institution, Ch. 8 Of The Students, By The Students and For the Students, Cambridge Scholars Publishing

⁴ (2009) Teng, Wolff, Qiang China EFL: Holistic English, the revolution has begun, Ch. 12 China EFL: Curriculum Reform, Nova Science Publishers.

This was followed by implementation of Holistic English at Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics, Nanchang, Jiangxi Province and subsequently at a private language school and three IT Corporate Training Centers in Dalian, Liaoning Province.⁵

China's largest corporation, PetroChina brought the Holistic English program to its corporate training Center in Guangzhou, Guangdong in September 2007.⁶

In March 2008 the top tier Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou embraced the Holistic English Program whole heartedly.⁷

To this point in time the Holistic English Program had proven its efficacy with Chinese students (undergraduate English and non-English majors and post-graduate non-English majors) in the low 4th tier colleges, Joint Venture Business Institutes, 3rd tier colleges, 2nd tier universities and top tier universities⁸. However, the Holistic English Program had not yet been tested at any of China's top 9 "Ivy League" Universities.⁹ (Peking University, Tsinghua University, Zhejiang University, Harbin Institute of Technology, Fudan University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Nanjing University, University of Science and Technology of China, and Xi'an Jiao Tong University)

Negotiations commenced in April 2010 to bring the Holistic English Program to one of China's "Ivy League" Universities. On May 12, 2010 the negotiations culminated in an on site inspection of facilities and a sit down with the English Department leadership.

THE UNIVERSITY

The University of Science and Technology of China (USTC) is located in Hefei, the capitol city of Anhui Province. Both the City and the Province lag behind in China's economic development and prosperity.

⁵ (2009) Wolff, Incompatibility of Holistic English with Corporate Training Centers, Ch. 14 China EFL: Curriculum Reform, Nova Science Publishers.

⁶ (2009) Wolff Incompatibility of Corporate Training Centers and Holistic English, Ch. 14 China EFL: Curriculum Reform, Nova Science Publishers.

⁷ (in press 2011) Zhe, Wolff Holistic English: A Revolution Not An Evolution, Ch. 9 Of The Students, By The Students and For the Students, Cambridge Scholars Publishing

(in press 2011) Wolff Holistic English: The Revolution Continues, Ch. 10 Of The Students, By The Students and For the Students, Cambridge Scholars Publishing

(in press 2011) Wolff Holistic English: The Revolution Blooms in spring 2010, Ch. 11 Of The Students, By The Students and For the Students, Cambridge Scholars Publishing

⁸ (2004) Teng, Wolff, Qiang, Can You Get a First Class Education at a Third Tier College in China? Vol. 13 Progress in Education, Nova Science Publishers

(in press 2011) Wolff, Meeking Student/Consumer Satisfaction Survey, Ch. 12 Of The Students, By The Students and For the Students, Cambridge Scholars Publishing

⁹Formation of China's Ivy League Hailed

<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90882/6794654.html>

The campus is fragmented into four separate campuses connected by a university shuttle bus. One campus has a mix of old red brick buildings with traditional ponds, lush landscaping and brand new architectural marvels reaching for the sky.. Another campus is cold and indifferent and looks more like a concrete jungle with sparse mature landscaping.

USTC is under the jurisdiction of the Chinese Academy of Science and is NOT under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education.

ENGLISH PRACTICE CENTER (EPC)

At the top of four flights of narrow stairs, in a rather outwardly plain looking building, in the middle of a concrete jungle, sits the EPC.



EPC ENTRANCE

This modern, state-of-the-art center is modeled after a similar facility at the City University of Hong Kong, reportedly the most advanced facility of its kind in all of Asia.

The first impression of this facility is that one has entered a sterile science lab.



Robert Wang of the Foreign Affairs Office in the EPC FOYER



EPC Magazine Rack

At the entrance there is a small English magazine display that gives the impression that the titles were selected more because the magazines are famous than for any diverse reading diversity or interest. (China Today, Beijing Review, People, Newsweek, Time, National Geographic, Reader's Digest, People) Absent are magazines that would appeal to a broad group of diverse students' personal reading interests. Absent from the rack were fashion magazines or "Seventeen" and "Popular Mechanics" or "Body Building" "Better Homes and Garden" and "Modern Architecture." The selection appears to follow the same mentality that most university libraries follow when adding English books to their collections. You can find Shakespeare and the famous classics but little else.

There are numerous small rooms with glass walls that have a central table and many chairs. Each room has a flat screen TV hung on the wall and reportedly world-wide TV channels are available. The main difference between the private language schools and the EPC is that the private language schools have a warm and welcoming personality. The

EPC has no ambiance, no personality but rather has all the attributes of a scientific laboratory. Even the smell is sterile. It was a little surprising that the Director of the EPC was not wearing a white lab coat. You be the judge, which facility suits your personal taste as a friendly environment? Compare the EPC with Wall Street Institute in the following pictures:

In the EPC there is an absence of live plants, or English proverbs on the walls. The students sit in glass rooms to be observed like fish in a fishbowl. This type of classroom is utilized by private language schools as an advertising tool. Prospective students visiting the private language school can see the school is busy and can observe a class in action without disturbing the class. At the EPC the advertising function is irrelevant but it appears reminiscent of watching rats in a maze. The students appear to be subjects of an experiment being conducted under glass.

There is no doubt that the EPC is a modern and up to date facility but it has no charm, no personality. It is a sterile laboratory environment that is far from a friendly English speaking environment as promoted on the Center's web site.

http://epc.ustc.edu.cn/m_main.asp

The EPC was set up to provide a relatively relaxed environment where students can practice skills learned in class among themselves as well as with native speakers of English, watch TV programs from major television networks in the English language, read for fun and improve writing skills on the computer using the data bank created for this purpose. Also, those with a learning problem can come to the Assessment Area, where special tests can be conducted to diagnose weaknesses in English proficiency and suggest remedial procedures. There are areas for topical issues, free talk and situational conversation. Even if you don't intend to talk at all, you can just pop in and observe, and join in when you feel like doing so. There is also an independent learning area equipped with computers with Internet access, where you can read materials on line and watch videos stored in our data bank. This won't feel like in a traditional classroom but it will help you learn. Have fun!

The Interaction Area is composed of six small rooms for Topical Discussions and Situational Conversations. Each room is equipped with a computer and a flat TV for facilitating conversation. Students can come to talk about everyday situations, discuss a special topic or just have a free chat in English.

The difference between the Chinese concept of a friendly environment and a western one is cultural. Traditionally the interior of a Chinese home is sparse, even sterile when measured by the typical interior of a western home. The EPC merely reflects this cultural difference.

To the extent that there is a friendly environment in the EPC, it would appear to be more a matter of the foreign teachers' personalities than the physical environment of the facility. **Less than 1,000 rmb worth of plants would completely change the ambiance of the EPC to a much friendlier environment, by western standards.** The stark nature of the EPC coincides with the stark nature of the average Chinese house interior which is also sparse in decoration and even furniture. Clearly the EPC meets a Chinese definition of a "friendly environment" and definitely NOT a western one.

THE EPC DIRECTOR

Sun Lan, PhD is an attractive young woman with a very engaging personality who speaks with a soft caramel voice. Due to the science lab nature of the facility it was a let down that she was not wearing a white lab coat.

It is immediately clear that she is very current on her knowledge of modern 2nd language acquisition theories and recent developments in psycholinguistics. Her English is native like with only minor traces of Chinglish. She presents herself as a true scholar.

During the conversation in one of the glass rooms, students came and went at will and not only listened but participated in our discussion. What should have been a business meeting turned into a form of demonstration teaching session.

Walking away, one is left with the distinct impression that the EPC is a psycholinguistics experimental laboratory and the students are but human guinea pigs in Dr. Sun Lan's experiment.

Dr. Sun Lan suggested that some aspects of Holistic English could possibly be incorporated into her program but she would need to discuss that with others. This was not encouraging and expectations were not high. The first impression was that no one was going to mess with Dr. Sun Lan's psycholinguistics project, a perception that was subsequently confirmed when HE was outright rejected by her, without explanation.

FOREIGN TEACHERS

There are presently 7 foreign teachers assigned to the EPC. They are all "old China hands" with 5 to 11 years of teaching experience in China. They are well educated with diverse majors and life experiences.

The University appears to place a high value on maturity and experience when recruiting foreign teachers. Absent are the usual recruiting prejudices: ageism, the prejudice for white skin and blue eyes, and the prejudice against Asian faces.

There are no inexperienced, immature, backpackers or guitar playing white monkeys on this faculty roster.

LIMITATIONS

The comments herein are based upon a review of the University web site, an exchange of emails and a 2 ½ hour visit. This is a report of first impressions based upon limited exposure. There was no opportunity to visit actual English classrooms or to speak with

any of the current foreign teaching staff. However, first impressions are important and the first impression of this University and its English teaching reform program is excellent.

CONCLUSION

USTC is to be congratulated on the establishment of the EPC as it is the first facility of its kind in mainland China.

It is ironic that the EPC does not exist in any famous comprehensive university or foreign studies university where 2nd language teaching is paramount, but exists in a science and technology university that is not even under the Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education should take note of this facility that represents true reform in English teaching rather than mere lip service and throwing money at new equipment purchases.

Unfortunately Holistic English does not fit the psycholinguistics laboratory mentality and will not be matriculating to China's Ivy League.