

# **HOLISTIC ENGLISH AT A JOINT VENTURE INSTITUTION**

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Province*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout China, English is taught in four separate and disjointed classes: reading, listening, writing, and speaking. There is no link or common subject matter among the classes. The foreign teacher is retained, primarily, to handle the oral class to *force*<sup>1</sup> speech production by chatting with the students. (Yes, there are exceptions, but we are speaking to the overall national situation at all levels of higher education throughout China. Yes, some foreigners do teach other than oral English. Yes, some foreigners are given teaching materials for oral English; however, those are the exceptions and they are few.)

The Holistic English Program replaces oral English learning with an English conversation experience; replaces teachers with facilitators; replaces set phrase or speech pattern memorization with language acquisition; develops self-confidence, intrinsic motivation, and develops autonomous learners and creative thinkers; and replaces graduates who are unable to produce comprehensible English with those who can.

There are Chinese beliefs such as: you *learn* English just like you learn any other subject; if you can speak English you can teach English; foreigners can just chat with Chinese students to improve their students' spoken English; English can be taught by Chinese speaking Chinese; and Chinese students will improve their oral English if *forced* to speak with a foreigner.<sup>2</sup>

Holistic English is simply taking one subject matter and using it for reading, listening, writing and *voluntary*<sup>3</sup> speaking in one single class. It emphasizes comprehensible input through very entertaining movies in a friendly English speaking environment. It is all about language acquisition rather than language learning. It emphasizes input rather than output. Watching dictioned movies is different from the audio-lingual method because the subtitles enable the students to read and comprehend the movie, and the story of the movie makes learning a pleasurable entertainment which makes implicit learning or incidental learning of the vocabulary possible. This is a combination of both explicit learning and implicit learning, or intentional learning and incidental learning, or conscious learning and unconscious learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Forced output raises the affective filter and actually prevents language acquisition. Krashen (2004) Applying the Comprehension Hypothesis: Some Suggestions

<sup>2</sup> The Comprehension Hypothesis claims that we acquire language by input, not by output, a claim is supported by studies showing no increase in acquisition with more output (Krashen, 2002b). Studies show, however, consistent increases in acquisition with more input.

<sup>3</sup> Comprehensible input-based methods encourage speaking but do not force it. Students are not called on; rather, participation is voluntary.

*Commencing with the 9/07 semester, Ed Roessler implemented the Holistic English program for his oral English classes at Shenyang Normal University's College of International Business (SNU-CIB). CIB is a joint venture (JV).*

## **THE JV**

In 2002, Shenyang Normal University (SNU) of Shenyang City, Liaoning Province, began a cooperative venture with [Fort Hays State University](#) (FHSU) of Fort Hays, Kansas, USA. The College of International Business (CIB, 國際商學院) offers American courses in business taught by Foreign Experts in English. Those courses are developed by FHSU professors and are accompanied by English textbooks, as well as online and classroom-oriented media. CIB is responsible for about half of the foreign teaching staff at the university.

By most measures, the venture has been very successful. The three graduating classes thus far have either found employment or been accepted to graduate programs in China and abroad.

In keeping with its non-traditional mandate, CIB offers three programs: classwork leading to an American degree from FHSU, a Chinese degree from SNU, or both.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shenyang\\_Normal\\_University](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shenyang_Normal_University) accessed July 5, 2009

## **THE TEACHERS**

### **SPRING 2008 SEMESTER, CIB at Shenyang Normal University Edwin Roessler**



**Edwin Roessler** was born in Hartford, Wisconsin, USA. He graduated Magna Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Wisconsin in 1978. He retired from a career with the US Government in 2003, and was appointed a “Foreign Expert” in China that same year, where he has continued to live and teach ever since. He has taught Business English, Western Culture, U.S. Government, American History, and Conversational English classes at various universities throughout China, as well as Business Ethics and English Composition classes for Fort Hays State University, Hays, Kansas

**FALL 2008 SPRING 2009 SEMESTERS, CIB at Shenyang Normal University**



**Peter Griggs**

2006 - Present: Shenyang, China - Finance & Oral English instructor for Shenyang Normal University - College of International Business

1980 - 2005: Washington DC, USA - financial systems analysis for both government and private industry.

Bachelor of Science, Highest Honors, Finance - University of Connecticut, USA

Project Management Professional certification

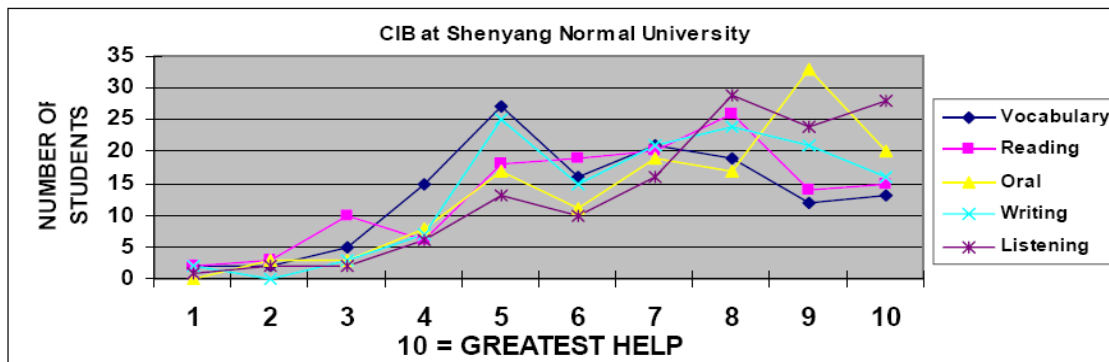
**THE STUDENTS**

Students who matriculate to CIB are categorized as “planned” and “unplanned”. The former are academically qualified to enter Shenyang Normal University, a 2<sup>nd</sup> tier university. Unplanned students are accepted to CIB’s FHSU-only degree program. CIB is composed of about 75% planned and 25% unplanned students. The academic range of the unplanned portion ranges from “best in the school” to tier 4-level accomplishment. At the end of each semester, all students are asked to fill out an anonymous questionnaire.. (See Chapter 3 Appendix F) Although some of these students must be considered of mixed educational capability, they assessed their benefits from the Holistic English program in the medium to high range.

**SPRING '08 (Edwin Roessler)**

**SPRING '08 Holistic English Freshmen I**

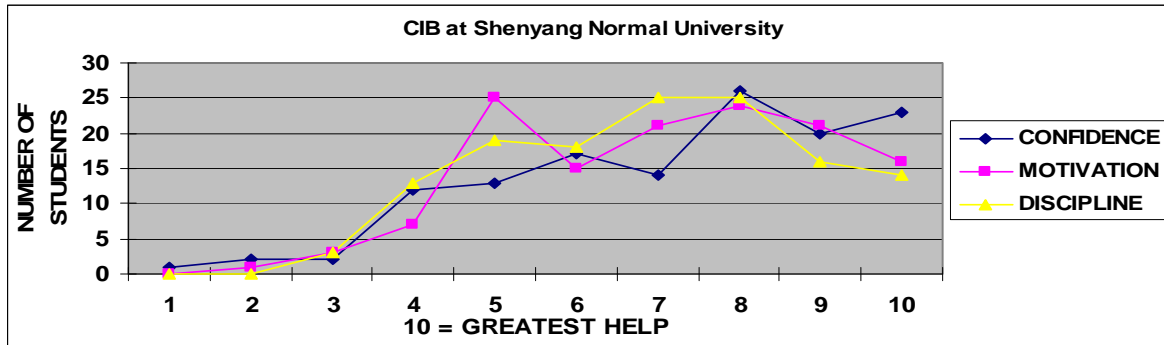
VOCABULARY – READING – LISTENING – WRITING – CONVERSATION



Graph 1

## SPRING '08 Holistic English Freshmen I

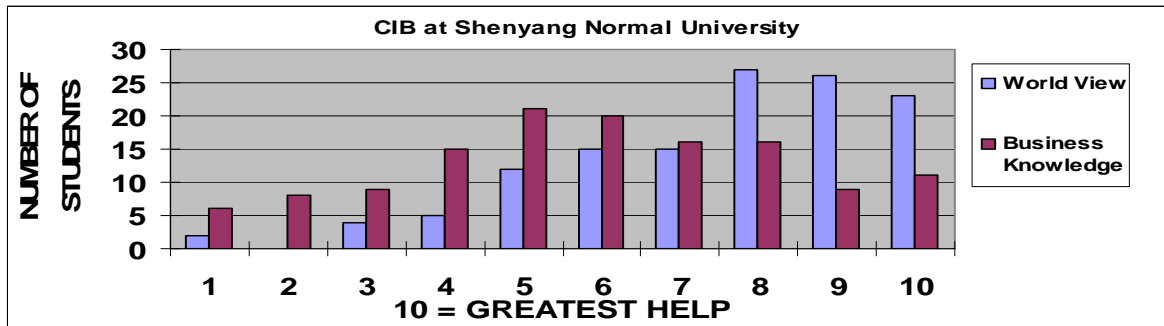
CONFIDENCE – MOTIVATION – DISCIPLINE



Graph 2

## SPRING '08 Holistic English Freshmen I

WORLD VIEW – BUSINESS KNOWLEDGE



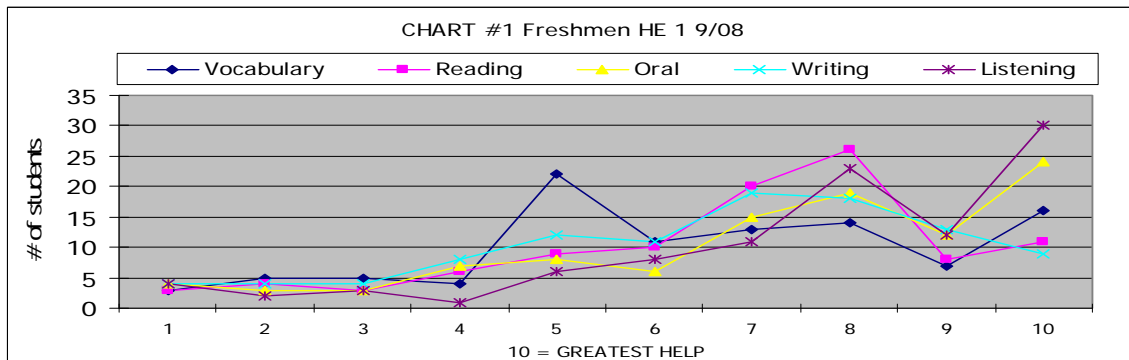
Graph 3

## FALL '08 (Peter Griggs)

100 freshmen students from 12 Provinces<sup>4</sup> completed Holistic English 1 commencing in 9/08. At the end of the semester all 100 students filled out a questionnaire.

### FALL '08 Holistic English Freshmen I

VOCABULARY – READING – LISTENING – WRITING – CONVERSATION

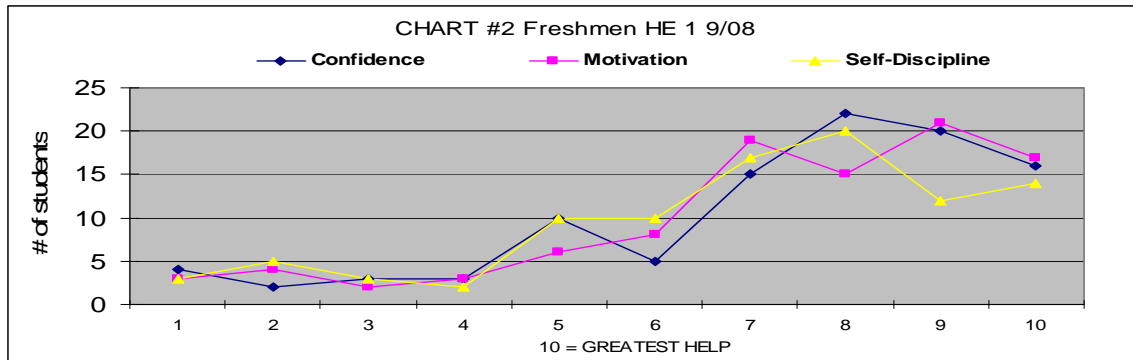


Graph 4

<sup>4</sup> Anhui, Hebei, Henan, Heilongjiang, Inner Mongolia, Jiangxi, Liaoning, Shandong, Shenyang, Shanxi, Tianjin,

## FALL '08 Holistic English Freshmen I

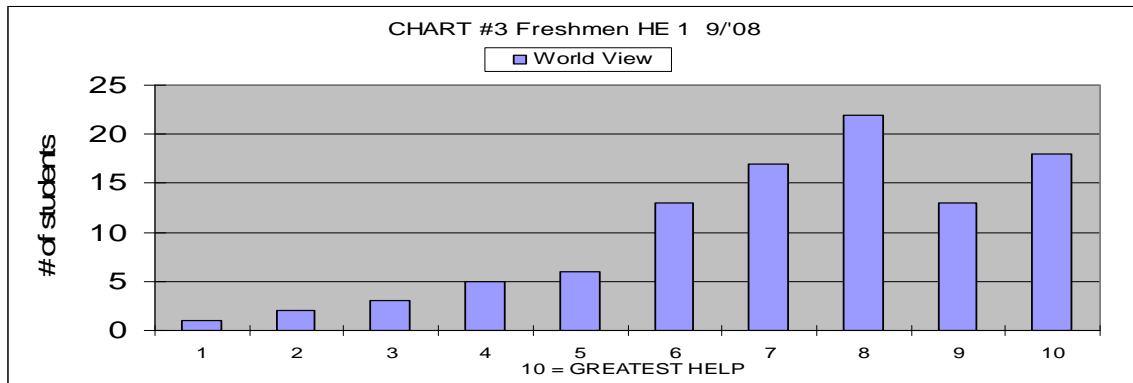
CONFIDENCE – MOTIVATION – DISCIPLINE



Graph 5

## FALL '08 Holistic English Freshmen I

WORLD VIEW



Graph 6

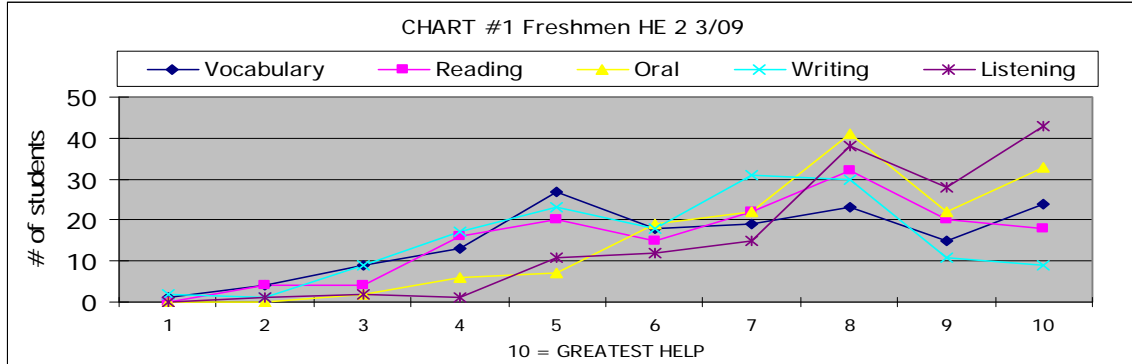
## SPRING '09 (Peter Griggs)

152 freshmen students from 14 Provinces<sup>5</sup> completed Holistic English 2 during the semester commencing 3/09. 52 students had not taken the prerequisite Holistic English 1 course which put them at a disadvantage. All 152 students filled out the questionnaire at the end of the semester.

<sup>5</sup> Anhui, Beijing, Fujian, Hebei, Henan, Heilongjiang, Inner Mongolia, Jiangxi, Jilin, Liaoning, Shandong, Shenyang, Shanxi, Sichuan, Tianjin,

## SPRING '09 Holistic English Freshmen 2

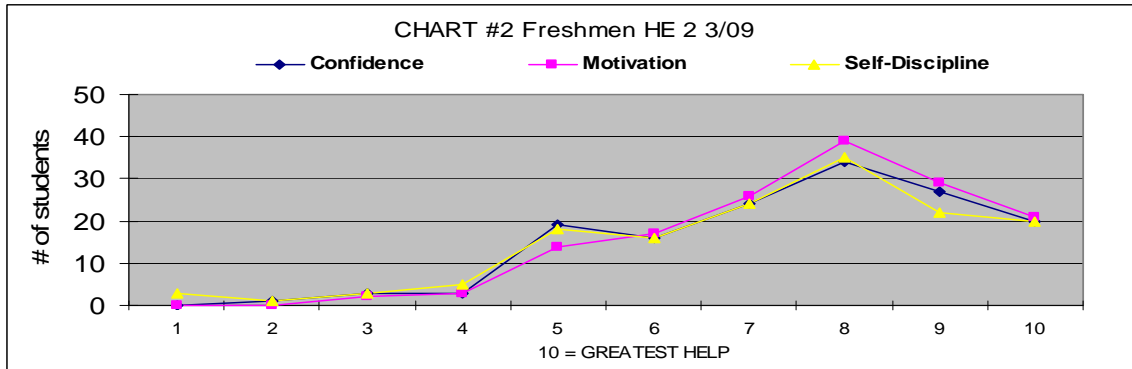
CONFIDENCE – MOTIVATION – DISCIPLINE



Graph 7

## SPRING '09 Holistic English Freshmen 2

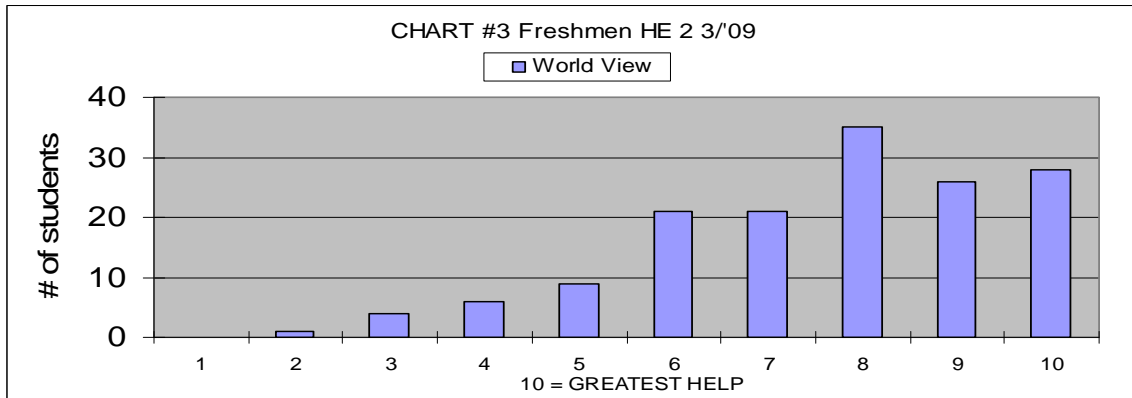
CONFIDENCE – MOTIVATION – DISCIPLINE



Graph 8

## SPRING '09 Holistic English Freshmen 2

WORLD VIEW



Graph 9

## ANALYSIS

5% of the CIB students claim that they failed to receive any appreciable benefit from the Holistic English Program. This 5% figure is consistent with the 5% of unreachable and unteachable 2<sup>nd</sup> tier students at Guangxi University, 2<sup>nd</sup> tier students at Xinyang Normal University, 3<sup>rd</sup> tier students at Xinyang Agricultural College and 4<sup>th</sup> tier students at Xinyang Technical College and Yang En College.<sup>6</sup> However, this is significantly higher than the 1.6 % of unreachable and unteachable postgraduate students at Sun Yat-sen University, a 1<sup>st</sup> tier university.<sup>7</sup>

The CIB students' self-assessment indicates a perceived benefits level median of 8, across the board. This figure is consistent with the perceived benefits level median of 8 indicated by 2<sup>nd</sup> tier students at Guangxi University, 2<sup>nd</sup> tier students at Xinyang Normal University, 3<sup>rd</sup> tier students at Xinyang Agricultural College and 4<sup>th</sup> tier students at Xinyang Technical College and Yang En College.<sup>8</sup> (CIB students are predominantly 2<sup>nd</sup> tier with some "unplanned" students at the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> tier levels.) The post-graduate students at Sun Yat-sen University claimed an overall perceived benefits level median of 9, across the board.<sup>9</sup>

It is noteworthy that Holistic English fills the oral English class while the students are also participating in the traditional reading, listening and writing classes. If the traditional classes were meeting the students' academic English needs, then the Holistic English charts for reading, listening and writing would constitute nothing more than a flat line. Obviously the traditional courses are lacking something that the Holistic English Program provides.

As the students' self-assessments indicate, Holistic English is not just another oral English class. In addition to incorporating reading, listening and writing, the Holistic English Program has significant success in developing intrinsic motivation and self-confidence while improving self-discipline and expanding world view.

## CONCLUSION

The educational background and employment history of the teachers is fairly representative of the diversity of "Foreign Experts" recruited to teach oral English throughout China. An educational background in English, Literature, Linguistics, Education or Teaching is not required. Prior teaching experience is not required.

With the exception of Dr. Niu Qiang, a Chinese National Psycholinguist and Dr. Wong Zhe, a Chinese National vice dean of the English teaching department at Sun Yat-sen University, none of the other participants in the development and testing of the Holistic English Program have any background in English, Literature, Linguistics, Education or Teaching. Each teacher has been free to utilize their own teaching methodology and style in the classroom.<sup>10</sup>

The students have ranged from China's best at a 1<sup>st</sup> tier university to China's lowest 4<sup>th</sup> tier level. The students represent 24 provinces and more than 125 undergraduate institutions of higher learning.

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<sup>6</sup> Qiang/Wolff/Teng (2009) CHINA EFL: The Revolution Has Begun But The Long March Lies Ahead, Ch. 3 China EFL: Time For Another Revolution, Nova Science Publications

<sup>7</sup> Wong/Wolff (2009) Holistic English: A Revolution – Not An Evolution, Ch. 5 China EFL: Time For Another Revolution, Nova Science Publications

<sup>8</sup> Qiang/Wolff/Teng (2009) CHINA EFL: The Revolution Has Begun But The Long March Lies Ahead, Ch. 3 China EFL: Time For Another Revolution, Nova Science Publications

<sup>9</sup> Wong/Wolff (2009) Holistic English: A Revolution – Not An Evolution, Ch. 5 China EFL: Time For Another Revolution, Nova Science Publications

<sup>10</sup> Wolff (2009) China EFL: Time For Another Revolution, Nova Science Publications

Administrative support has ranged from indifference/tolerance to 100% , including financial.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, the students of Holistic English Program claim that it has delivered significant educational benefits, on a consistent basis, clearly indicating the efficacy of the program across a broad spectrum of students and diversity of teachers with varying degrees of administrative support.

We will continue to teach the Holistic English Program whenever and wherever permitted.

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<sup>11</sup> Wolff (2009)China EFL: Time For Another Revolution, Nova Science Publications