Teachers' Perspectives on Professional Development:
A Case Study of Innovation at a Chinese University

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This article examines teacher development as an effect of teaching innovations and a teacher education program run for four years (2001-2005) for the faculty of a university in China. The innovation targeted teaching philosophy, curriculum, methods of classroom instruction, testing, and the learning environment. Accordingly, a set of teacher education activities, including group preparation for lessons, team teaching, peer coaching, and teaching reflection, were conducted. The present study describes the background and contents of the program and analyzes its impact on the development of the teachers involved. Teachers' perspectives were collected through an open-ended questionnaire. The results showed that teachers think the program has benefited them much in teacher development. Yet much is to be improved in its further implementation, especially in such aspects as developing a culture of research, textbook writing, professional use of English, and cultivating a community of practice.

Teaching Innovation, CLT, and Teacher Education

In the past two decades or so, there has been some notable research relating to changes in English language curricula in contexts where English is not the first language (Hall & Hewings 2001). Some articles provide general guidance in the field of English language teaching (ELT) innovation (e.g. Lewis, Carter & Markee 2001), while several case studies are of specific reference value.

Language teaching innovation has been linked with the evolution of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, which has been regarded as a symbol of innovation in ELT worldwide ever since its emergence (Liao 2000). Yet, when formally introduced into China in the 1990s, CLT met with considerable resistance (Liao 2000). Noted professor Li (1984) not only defended CLT by arguing for its benefits to ELT in China, but wrote her textbook based on CLT concepts as well. The four-volume

textbook *Communicative English for Chinese Learners,* or CECL (Li 1987; 2000), first published in the late 1980s, was very influential in Chinese universities. Both Li's article (1984) and textbook (1987, 2000) had a big influence on Chinese EFL teachers' attitudes towards CLT.

During roughly the same period (particularly in the second half), studies on (second) language teacher education have drawn more and more researchers' attention. Some fundamental works (Richards 1998; Richards & Farrell 2005; Roberts 1998) as well as insightful articles (Hawkins 2004; Richards & Nunan 1990; Tedick 2005) were published. As an introduction to language teacher training and development, Roberts' (1998) *Language Teacher Education* is of immediate value for teachers and educators in both pre-service and in-service programs. Richards (1998) discusses language teacher development from a holistic approach beyond the level of "training." In their latest work, Richards and Farrell (2005) further examine ten different strategies that facilitate professional development in language teaching, such as workshops, peer coaching, team teaching, peer observation, teacher support groups, etc. In addition to these monographs, some case studies (Byrnes 2005; Freeman & Johnson 2005; Hawkins 2004; Hiramatsu 2005; Richards & Penington 1998; Stein 2004; Willett & Miller 2004;) are instructive in the field of second language teacher education. Both the foundational works and the case studies provide guiding principles as well as references for both research and practice in language teacher education. Few of the works, however, concentrate on the effects of innovative programs on teachers' professional development.

The present study examines a teaching innovation and teacher education program in an EFL context in China. Driven by the need for teaching innovation in a university in South China, this program primarily involves English language teachers in interpreting and applying CLT concepts in their classrooms. This case study analyzes teachers' perspectives on their development during the program's implementation. It also tries to explore the feasibility of increasing the program's effectiveness in further implementation.

Background and Rationale

It is an unarguable fact that China has the largest population in the world, and it also has the largest population of EFL learners. According to Wu (2005), the number of candidates taking CET4/6[1] was over 11 million in 2004, which made CET4/6 the largest-scale single-subject test in the world. As one of the most prestigious international studies universities in China, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (GDUFS)

[1] CET4/6 (College English Test Band 4/6) is a nation-wide English proficiency test for undergraduates implemented in China since 1987 and is regarded as the most authoritative English test for Chinese college students.

shoulders the heavy task of cultivating internationally competitive talents for South China. The GDUFS students, whether they are foreign language majors (mainly English) or other majors, are all required to have a high proficiency in English, and this has been constituted as an important characteristic of the university's educational mission. In order to improve the quality of English teaching, GDUFS formed the Institute for English Language Education (IELE) in May 2001, which was mainly responsible for "college English teaching" to all non-English major undergraduates of the 10 schools in GDUFS (in September 2005, IELE also began to enroll its own students as English Education majors).

The very purpose of forming IELE, from the university's perspective, was to improve students' learning performance in English. Therefore, the GDUFS leadership placed emphasis on the teaching innovations introduced at IELE, offering every possible support (at least morally) as needed.

When IELE was formed, the teachers were placed into different divisions according to the courses they were teaching. Division I was responsible for the teaching of freshmen's Comprehensive English (the core English course of IELE); Division II for sophomores'; Division III was teaching juniors' courses, including advanced English and interpretation and translation courses; and Division IV was for the audio-video courses mainly to freshmen and sophomores. The four divisions were relatively independent from one another in conducting their daily activities, and they received their innovative tasks directly from the IELE leadership.

At its foundation, IELE had 46 teachers. Before that, these teachers were teaching English to non-English majors in different schools of GDUFS. Many of them were ambivalent when gathered into the new institute. Traditionally prevailing in China's ELT circle was a stereotype that "college English teachers" (formerly referred to as "public English teachers") were categorized into the "disadvantaged group" (Xia 2005) as compared with "English major teachers" and thus were in a lower position in the field. The teachers of IELE (who all taught college English then) are not an exception, especially in such a university as GDUFS, which enjoys prestige mainly for its former performance in English major education. Therefore the teachers of IELE first faced the challenge of improving their professional dispositions and thus updating the "image" of IELE in others' eyes (telephone interview with Leader K on Dec. 30, 2005, hereafter Ld. K interview). This is one of the internal reasons behind the innovation, at least from the leadership's perspective.

Externally, the students were not satisfied with the English teaching at GDUFS when IELE was established in 2001. For one, most students in GDUFS, whatever their major, upon graduation, intend either to get a promising job at an international corporation in China or to pursue further studies abroad and thus have high expectations for their English

learning in the classroom. What's more, nation-wide appeals for innovative ELT have been made from both top-down and bottom-up channels since 2000, especially at the college level.

Additionally, student enrolment has been increasing yearly nation-wide since 2001. The majority of the "expanded enrolment" students in GDUFS are non-English majors, whose English classes are taught by IELE teachers in the university. To meet the need of English teaching, the number of IELE teachers was increased to 120 in May 2005 (from the original 46), of which 86% were under 35 years old (and about 90% are female). These teachers were basically inexperienced in teaching when they joined IELE, though most of them have MA degrees in either English Language and Literature or Applied Linguistics from universities at home. A few hold MAs in TESOL or Education from universities in English-speaking countries like the UK, the US and Australia. The young teachers all face the challenge of adapting themselves to the IELE teaching to meet the higher demand of students at GDUFS. To address these needs, IELE has been initiating teaching innovations to improve teachers' classroom performance ever since its inception, and this endeavor has not ceased in the past 4 years.

Strategies, Measures and Implementation

Viewing language as a tool for communication, CLT approaches insist that interactive speaking activities in classrooms be instances of real communication, which ensures that students receive sufficient exposure to the target language. Therefore, application of a CLT approach in China's classrooms would benefit teachers, students and the government (Liao 2000). Li (2005) said, "Whatever in language teaching is good for a learner as a human being is communicative language teaching." Looking historically and developmentally, the teaching innovation program of IELE has been a complete set of top-down innovative policies based on fundamental concepts of CLT and carried out by IELE teachers, especially in its early period (Ld. K interview). As Li and Huo (2004) state, the purpose of the innovation is to construct a "new system of college English teaching," which is represented in the following "five-aspects" of reform:

1. The teaching philosophy shifting from teacher-centered teaching to student-centered learning

2. Curriculum from a single course to course variety

3. Classroom instruction from one-way transmission to multi-interactions

4. Testing system from the mechanical written form to flexible testing methods

5. English learning environment extending English learning from the classroom to the web and society

Following the five aspects, the IELE leadership first pushed teachers to be involved in a number of activities as part of the teacher education program in order to incorporate the institutional policy into teachers' individual perceptions. These include team preparation for lessons, adapted use of textbooks, clinical supervision, peer coaching, peer observation, teaching reflection, team teaching, action research, collaboration, and mentoring.

In support of better practice of these activities, IELE organized a series of lectures, seminars and workshops on language teaching and learning given by noted professors and scholars from home and abroad. The topics concerned were: action research, critical thinking, questioning strategies, classroom management, teaching beyond textbooks, reflective teaching, statistics for research, and other latest theories in second language pedagogy. These activities were conducted either institute-wide or in divisions.

Effective implementation of the program includes: regular meetings of division leaders (usually once a week), division meetings for lesson preparation (usually once every two weeks), regular teacher seminars, frequent collaborative projects, periodic faculty research presentations, reflective and cooperative teaching activities, and systematic measures to improve the student assessment process. For example, in order to change students' test-driven learning behavior, IELE has made great efforts reforming its testing system through these years (Dong 2005). The current testing system, now in practice in the Comprehensive English course, not only puts much more emphasis on formative evaluation rather than relying on a one-time result but also stresses the combination of proficiency and achievement instead of focusing on written test paper scores only.

The change of both students' total score calculations and the construct of the final writtentest paper can be reflected in the following table (Dong 2005):

Table 1:
Evolution of IELE's Testing System (2001-05)

Academic year	Total score breakdown			Final paper construct	
	Mid-term score	Final score	Daily performance	Responsive questions	Productive questions
2001-02 (1)	40%	50%	10%	70%	30%
2001-02 (2) through 2003	40%	40%	20%	80%	20%
2003-04	Canceled	60%	40%	50%	50%
2004-05	Canceled	40%	60%	30%	70%

The grade for daily performance during the 2003-05 academic years was calculated based on four equal aspects, namely, attendance and

participation, homework assignments, class quizzes, and group presentation. In this way, students were directed to learn English for use instead of for a test. Although a CET4/6 certificate was a must for college students to get employment after graduation, IELE teachers, in general, did not spend class hours preparing students for the test as their counterparts in many other universities do, because of the CET4/6's emphasis on students' receptive-response ability instead of integrated communicative competence in English.

In addition to normal class instruction, programs such as Radio Campus, Movie Night, English Olympics, Contest of English Skills, and English Sunday School were introduced along with IELE's English learning website open free to students in order to extend students' English learning environment.

To sum up, the core of the teaching innovation is to internalize the new philosophy of teaching, shifting the traditional teacher-focused class pattern to a learner-centered CLT approach in order to enhance students' English communicative competence through communication in English. All the other aspects are strategies to support the actualization of this goal.

Some Positive Results So Far

During the implementation of the program, IELE has achieved some positive results both from institutional improvement and students' satisfaction with IELE's teaching. From the institutional perspective, the following facts are accepted as IELE's achievement in the local standard.

1. In the annual campus-wide student evaluation on teachers' teaching conducted by GDUFS' Teaching Affairs Division, IELE teachers' average score ranked in the top 5 among the 13 schools of GDUFS for 3 consecutive years (2002-2004). This in part showed the collective teaching performance of IELE teachers in students' eyes had to some degree improved their "image" from being a "disadvantaged" group.

2. A series of textbooks developed by IELE teachers has been formally published. As of August 2005, four textbooks had been published: *Transitions* (I & II) by Guangdong Higher Education Press; *Study Strategies* by Shanghai Education Press; *Viewpoints* (I & II) by Shanghai Education Press; and *New Perspectives* by Chongqing Press. In addition, *Western Culture and Society* and *Translation and Interpretation* are in progress for publication. These textbooks were in themselves evidence of IELE teachers' collaboration and teamwork. Teachers have also improved their abilities in critiquing the authoritative textbooks through selecting materials.

3. The 1st National Conference on College English Classroom Teaching and Teacher Development, sponsored and hosted by IELE, was held in GDUFS in August 2005. This conference attracted nearly 200 participants (Guide to the 1st National Conference on College English Classroom Teaching and Teacher Development 2005) from universities all over China. About 157 teachers presented their research works, of which 33 were from IELE. In 2003, a book entitled *Action Research* (Hu 2003) was published, which collected 42 articles of IELE teachers under such subtitles of research as "EFL teaching and management," "EFL classroom teaching," etc.

At the same time, students felt more satisfied with IELE's teaching. A questionnaire was conducted by students in May 2004 (Huo & Dong 2004) to get students' opinions on the effect of IELE's teaching innovation. Eight of its 9 multiple-choice questions had positive average responses (Huo & Dong 2004). The questionnaire asked questions such as whether (and to what degree) the respondent liked the learner-centered teaching approach, the Sino-foreign teachers' team teaching, and the testing reform, etc. An investigation made by Liang (2005) on the effect of group presentation in the classroom also got positive feedback. Nearly all students investigated like this activity in class. Most students think that group presentation not only "broadens our vision and makes us learn about how to get information from various media" but also "enables us to enlarge our vocabulary and use the words more precisely." They gained "more confidence as our spoken English ability has been upgraded" and were "learning English through using the language" (Liang 2005).

Research Questions and Conceptual Framework

As a teacher in IELE for these years since its birth, I experienced the whole process of the program, first as a division leader (2001-03), and then as a vice-dean (2003-05). The research question motivating my case study is: What is the effect of the long-term (4 years), large-scale (institute-wide) program in question on teachers' development in their own perspective? Specifically, has the program helped teachers to develop? If so, in what ways? Also, what has it not helped?

The questions above are discussed within the following conceptual framework. Richards and Farrell (2005) find that the field of language teaching is subject to rapid changes, as the profession responds to new educational paradigms and trends, and institutions face new challenges resulting from changes in curriculum, national tests, and student needs. As a result, language teachers are expected to keep up to date with developments in the field, to regularly review and evaluate their teaching skills, and to take on new teaching assignments according to the

changing needs of the institution. Therefore, language teachers need regular opportunities for professional development. In discussing the relationship between teachers' development and institutional improvement, Richards and Farrell (2005) state that the professional development of language teachers is directed toward both the institution's goals and the teachers' own personal goals. Achieving personal growth and improving departmental performance can go hand in hand. From the institutional perspective, teacher development is primarily conceived of in terms of the needs of the institution, usually being examined from the following goals: institutional improvement, the enhanced level of student learning, and teachers' professional development.

From the perspective of the IELE leadership (Ld. K interview), the teaching innovation at IELE was aimed toward meeting students' needs, institutional needs, and the need for the teachers' long-term professional development. This study specifically examines teachers' professional development through the program.

Data Collection

In the results of the program, the study utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methods (Thomas 2003). Based on the interview protocol made by Johnston et al. (2005), I developed a questionnaire (see Appendix). The questionnaire was written in English and individually sent as an e-mail attachment to a sample of 40 IELE teachers as participants (including senior, middle-aged and younger teachers) to complete in English from late December 2005 to late January 2006. In e-mails to the teachers, I stated that the questionnaire was only for research, so they were asked to reply candidly. One amended version of the questionnaire was made for the IELE consultant, an educational expert from Canada referred to here as Dr. N, to complete. The only difference between the two was that the version for the consultant was mainly to elicit his commentary on the teachers' development based on his observations and perception while working in IELE these years.

The data from the questionnaires are the basis for discussing the program's effect on IELE teachers' professional development. In addition, data sources in this study include my participation and close observation, facts from IELE records, telephone interviews, e-mail exchanges, and internet chats with IELE teachers, leaders, and the consultant.

Data Analysis and Findings

In addition to Dr. N's feedback, 26 out of the 40 participants responded to the questionnaire: 16 young teachers (under 35), 7 middle-

aged (35-44), and 3 seniors (45 and above)[2]. They represent a population of 120 teachers of IELE. The following paragraphs summarize these teachers' comments on the program, which are organized into 5 categories according to the questionnaire: life stories, teacher knowledge, teacher development, identity, and sociopolitical context.

On Life Stories

All the middle-aged and senior teachers were college teachers of English either in GDUFS or other universities in China before they joined IELE; thirteen of the sixteen young teachers were recent graduates while a few had some teaching experience before that, and one had worked in business.

When discussing the important things about their personal lives, many teachers considered becoming a member of IELE or GDUFS itself – being exposed to a totally new teaching environment – as a significant event; others mentioned their marriage, their family change, and their maturity. In describing the turning point of their professional lives, most teachers referred to the more opportunities in IELE for workshops, lectures and seminars:

> During my teaching career up till now, I think two teaching concepts have had great impact on my teaching: communicative language teaching (CoLT) and critical language teaching (CrLT). …When CrLT was first introduced to classroom, I felt unsafe: "Are we teaching language?" However, looking back on the past 3 years, I think the CrLT works pretty well in teaching. Students do not blindly accept what was preached. They begin to critically think and defend in English. (Ms. Mz)

In seeing the next five-year goals, ten of the sixteen young teachers stated that they planned to pursue PhD studies either at home or abroad, and most middle-aged and senior teachers wanted to do more research while teaching well.

> Since I have rich experience in teaching, maybe I would like to carry out some research on pedagogy. (Ms. Mz)

> My goals are to be a better teacher and to improve myself as a researcher. (Ms. Md)

Many teachers (in all 3 age groups) want to "get professional promotion." And some young teachers "would rather lead a happy life" and "have a lovely baby" in looking forward to their personal lives in the future.

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[2] For convenience and protecting teachers' identities, all teachers of the 3 groups, when quoted individually, are referred to respectively as Mr./Miss plus the surname initial for the young, Mr./Ms. M plus the surname initial for the middle-aged, and Mr./Ms. S plus the surname initial for the senior. All surnames are pseudonyms.

On Teacher Knowledge

Most teachers, particularly the young teachers, think that they have greatly benefited from the IELE teacher education program, especially from "teaching together with a foreigner," "teaching exchanges among peers and doing reflection," "the sit-in session in the classroom," and "teamwork and idea exchange" with colleagues. It was from this that they have "learned how to be generous and frank to share things and ideas, how to sacrifice and work harder without considering returns, how to cooperate with people, and how to learn from others" (Miss M).

Many young teachers have benefited in bridging the gap between teachers' knowing and doing:

> I have to say that I have learned a lot and have benefited a lot since I came here. There is a big gap between knowing and doing. Teaching here and learning from my colleagues have helped me to bridge that gap! I believe I am much better than before in organizing different kinds of learning activities, helping the students to go through the learning process by themselves rather than depending on the teacher or rote memory! (Miss H)

Some teachers stress the benefit from peer cooperation:

> Teaching is in most cases a very individual work.... The IELE teacher education program, however, provides the teachers a platform where they can share with and learn from each other. (Miss Z)

But some middle-aged and senior teachers, while believing in its positive effect, also think that "the program seems to be too sporadic," and that "one or two lectures cannot give [a] clear idea of some academic theories" (Ms. Mz).

The IELE teacher education program did take effect in some ways, but mostly it is superficial: "The IELE teacher education program should be held systemically in series so that everyone benefits from it" (Mr. Sh).

Some young teachers seek more academic input in the teacher education program, saying, "… but we still lack of academic communication in our institute. Teachers put most energy on how to improve teaching skills, very little, or even no effort [are put] on how to improve our academic level" (Miss Y).

On Teacher Development

Many teachers stated that the most useful parts of IELE's teacher education program are the lectures, seminars and workshops organized to help them change the teaching concepts and improve their classroom skills:

> Those lectures given by Dr. N [the consultant of IELE] have enlightened us with KSA [Knowledge, Skill and Attitude] teaching. How to encour-

age students' cooperative learning? How to inspire students' critical thinking? How to organize activities in big classes? All these are tricks that I've learned from development programs in IELE. Not only I, but all the other teachers, especially young teachers, have benefited a lot from these development programs. (Ms. Mz)

Some teachers learned the importance (and method) of doing their own research:

> I will keep on reading relevant journal articles, attending lectures and research groups as a main form of learning. Apart from keeping myself informed in the field, I will continue to explore my own language classroom and develop myself to be a better teacher and researcher. (Ms. Md)

Nearly all teachers (21 out of the 26) explicitly expressed as their goal "to further my study in the future and get some progress in research field." A veteran teacher, who has some important publications already, still wrote:

> I will carry on some researches on pedagogy, such as teacher development, teachers' behavior in class, etc. But first of all, I'll try to improve my theoretical background for research, for example, by visiting some academic units [institutions], by attending academic conferences, by going to some lectures, etc. I hope I will become a good teaching practitioner as well as a good academic researcher. (Ms. Mz)

On Identity

IELE teachers show great confidence. Nearly all teachers believe they are "good teachers." While many say they are professional in teaching, some teachers, especially the young, admit that they are "not professional enough" because their "knowledge of teaching is not enough." Many teachers recognize their multi-identities not only in professional, but also in their personal lives:

> I identify myself as a language teacher as well as a participant in the classroom. I am also a researcher. The identity of a teacher or facilitator for students is most important. (Ms. Md)

> I am a wife, a mother, a daughter and at the same time a teacher. To me, the most important identity is to be a wife and a mother. (Miss S)

> I'm a young teacher, my mother's daughter, and somebody's colleague. All of these identities are important to me. (Miss X)

On Sociopolitical Context

These were the most interesting and varied responses. Apparently teachers have different understandings about the term "sociopolitical."

Many teachers didn't know what to say, or explicitly distanced themselves:

> "I have never been involved in any political contexts, because I have a belief that being a qualified citizen and a popular teacher is much better and rewarding." (Ms. Mz)

Some mentioned the institutional context of GDUFS, stating that "the personnel system – the system for the teaching evaluation, the welfare, the leading ways of the leaders, and their attitude to us teachers, influence our work, our life, our knowledge, and our identity" (Ms. Mm).

Some mentioned the institutional context at IELE, saying "mainly the activities initiated by our faculty [make us] become more involved in the faculty" (Miss Z).

A young teacher, who benefits from all kinds of these activities, spoke highly of the atmosphere:

> They [the context] not only entertained the faculty but offered opportunities for the teachers to know each other better. They brought unity and harmony to this young team. (Mr. M)

But some teachers, especially the middle-aged and senior teachers have a clearer and more objective awareness of the micro-sociopolitical context of IELE:

> I have been working in a friendly and dynamic social context since I came here. There are a lot of opportunities for teachers to know more about one another and [to] make friends.... But as to the political context, the teachers do not have much freedom as to which textbook to use, which course to teach, and they do not have much say in the course design. The policy making power is possessed in the mastery of the heads of the institute. (Ms. Md)

A young teacher who was trusted with a "glorious heavy burden of task" – being appointed a division leader upon entering IELE – felt overused and under stress:

> I think IELE creates a relatively relaxing and free atmosphere. Individualism is allowed and teachers are encouraged to use and share different ways of teaching. These contexts enable me to have a relaxing mind and concentrate on my work. The bad thing is when you are overused, you feel stressful and desperate. (Miss M)

Another young teacher, who has stayed at IELE from the very beginning, wrote:

> IELE, I admit, is an institute where most of the teachers feel stressed and overloaded. I have never felt this way that I am always running out of time almost every day. I am always kept busy and worried, if not for this reason, it must be some others! I am exhausted! (Miss H)

Discussion and Implications

As described above, the teaching innovation and teacher education program of IELE has brought about many positive results in terms of both institutional improvement (including student satisfaction with IELE teaching) and teachers' development. This may be used for reference for other similar programs. However, as in any objective case study, I should take a further look at other aspects, which the program has not achieved as expected. Roughly speaking, there are four aspects that need to be considered by both teachers and the leadership of IELE: developing a culture of research, maintaining coherence in writing textbooks, encouraging teachers' use of English in their professional activities, and emphasizing more on bottom-up communities of practice rather than top-down leadership practices.

Culture of Research

From the perspective of teachers' long-term development, research should not be neglected, especially for a teacher at university level. In his reply to the questionnaire, Dr. N commented, "Everyone [in IELE] has grown professionally;" at the same time he mentioned one of the "three major tasks" he would accomplish before leaving GDUFS is to "create a 'culture of research' in the IELE":

> At present, everyone focuses on teaching and hardly anyone does any real research. In this way, the IELE is more like a senior middle school than a university faculty.... They [IELE teachers] don't seem to realize that a university teacher is also a researcher. We are expected to contribute to the knowledge base that underlies our work. (Dr. N)

In fact, many teachers did realize the importance of being a researcher while being a teacher, but found that they were not facilitated by IELE to do research:

> It seemed, however, most of the teacher education program focused on teaching instead of research, which is actually equally important to a university teacher. Besides, the education program was usually general, targeting the faculty as a whole. As a result, the teachers were not trained or developed in a special field and most of them do not have their specialties. (Mr. M)

From the statistics annually released by the Research Office of GDUFS, few IELE teachers were mentioned as having done quality research work. Fewer teachers from IELE have been granted any research projects or won research awards at different levels so far. This situation contrasts sharply with the shining position of IELE in the campus-wide teaching evaluation rank.

In GDUFS, which is a teaching-oriented university at present and is marching toward a teaching-research-oriented one, teachers' research is given increasing priority. A teacher's professional promotion is mainly based on her/his publications of research if s/he completes a certain number of class hours of teaching during the specified years (which all teachers could easily do). Therefore, to a teacher, whether s/he can be quickly promoted mainly depends on her/his research ability. That is why many teachers set "doing academic research" among their future goals. After all, teaching and research cannot be separated from each other. Doing research demands wise reading and deep perception of the latest advancements of a specific field, and thus can support classroom teaching; in return, teaching offers needed topics for research, especially teaching-related topics. Hence, teaching and research should go hand in hand.

Textbook Writing

In the questionnaire conducted with the students (Huo & Dong 2004), the only question out of nine that received less than positive feedback was on the new teaching materials, or the textbook. Only 33.4% of students liked it, and 76.6% of students took neutral or negative attitudes toward the newly made textbook (Huo & Dong 2004).

One apparent reason for these attitudes was that the new teaching materials had not yet been made into a textbook form at that time, but rather were distributed as sheet packs handed out to students one by one each time before class, which was very inconvenient for students to keep for use. Other reasons, elicited from informal interviews and chats with students, included that the textbook content was insufficient, especially in the topic-related input materials. In fact, compared with *New College English* (published in 2000 and popular for years), which former GDUFS students used as the textbook, the IELE's self-made textbooks really seemed much thinner, not to mention the four newly-made English "textbook packs"[3] recommended by the Ministry of Education (MoE). Some teachers' suggestion that they try using some of the MoE recommended textbooks in some classes was flatly turned down by the IELE leadership.

This decision not only inhibited IELE teachers' freedom to choose their own textbooks, but also denied their entitlement to participate in a series of teacher training sessions annually organized by the four presses. As a rule, all the four presses sponsor five-day free symposia nation-wide, during summer vacations, for college English teachers who use the textbooks published by them. From the perspective of the press-

es, they mainly intend to advertise the advantages of their textbooks through training lectures given by textbook writers or noted scholars. For the teachers, however, they can not only benefit from the lectures with some recent advancement in language teaching philosophy, but also have an opportunity to exchange ideas with colleagues from other universities. However, since IELE began to write their own textbooks in 2003, no teachers have enjoyed this opportunity.

As for the IELE textbooks themselves, the lack of inherent connection across the different textbooks is one of their weaknesses. Since they were written relatively independently (which can be seen from their various presses) by different divisions and without an overall plan, some contents overlap, while others are missing. Indeed, Dr. N identifies as his second major task to "create an Integrated Master Plan for the non-English major courses." Specifically, he wants to do the following for IELE's textbooks:

1. A scope and sequence for each course, level and the overall program;

2. Knowledge-Skill-Attitude sequences for each course;

3. Teacher manuals with support DVD's including sample lessons for each course;

4. A complete revision of the examination system to one based on authentic assessment; and,

5. A differentiated curriculum for the various majors that is more relevant to that particular major.

Therefore, the task of IELE textbook writing, if IELE aims to make a quality product, is far from completed.

Professional Language Use

A big shortcoming in the collaboration of IELE teachers is the scarce use of professional language, that is, English in daily communication between teachers. This is in fact the first task identified by Dr. N, to "develop the use of Professional English (as opposed to Classroom or Instructional English) by IELE teachers":

Right now, the working language of the faculty [IELE] is Chinese and this inhibits the ability of the faculty to communicate effectively in professional English.... This not only slows down the process [of thinking in English] but results in professional writing that is characterized by a kind of 'Chinglish' which uses English vocabulary and Chinese grammar. (Dr. N)

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[3] Since 2001, four influential publishing houses in China's foreign language teaching circle, namely, the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, China Higher Education Press, and Tsinghua University Press, published their "cubic English textbooks" with courseware packs and multimedia platform as well as the paper-made students' and teachers' books and computer disks.

As a matter of fact, nearly all the communicative events in IELE, including division meetings, academic discussions and informal talks, took place in Chinese, except in the case of a foreign teacher's participation in these activities. This is quite understandable and naturally accepted by the teachers, because, after all, native language is most convenient in communication when talking with another native speaker of the same language. So it seems to be a long way to go for IELE teachers to use English as the professional language in their daily communication.

Community of Practice

As analyzed above, IELE teachers are an excellent teaching team with great potential in both teaching and research. From my observation and experience these years, IELE had frequent meetings for division leaders, course coordinators, and teachers at different levels in order to implement the continuous innovations in teaching. Instead of brainstorming and discussing on an equal basis, these meetings were in many cases dominated by the leaders with instructing and assigning tasks to the participants. Many teachers felt "great pressure from the leadership... that drives me to run all the time, never have the time to stop, or rest!" (Miss G). A few division leaders, unable to bear such a busy schedule and heavy burden, resigned from their positions. They felt much more relieved and happier after resignation (personal communication through net chats & emails). Besides, many activities organized by IELE (whether in teaching, academics, or entertainment) were implemented as lock-step behavior mandated by the leadership as one voice, much lacking in variety and options. In an academic institution of higher education, a relatively free and democratic atmosphere is badly needed for research accomplishments.

As a teaching community with rather harmonious and collaborative relations, IELE does help gestate some small groups with features of community of practice (CoP) (Sharp 1997), from which most young teachers really benefit. But, as a whole, IELE, in its real sense, is yet to be a CoP, which "cannot be created by fiat" (Sharp 1997). As most activities are organized and policies carried out "top down" (Ld. K interview), teachers usually "do not have much say" (Ms. Md); in many cases, teachers' (especially the middle-aged and senior teachers') roles and potentials could not get full play. Even in the last stage (stage IV) of collaboration in IELE, only "60% of teachers collaborate with others voluntarily and actively from their original passiveness" (Li and Huo 2005). After all, "teachers are key players in any attempt to promote innovations in syllabus design" (Markee 2001: 119). "Programs which involve participants in the planning, organization, management, delivery and evaluation of all actions in which they [teachers] are expected to participate have more chances of success than those planned using a top-down approach, where

administrators make decisions in lieu of teachers" (Diaz Maggioli 2003: 4, cited in Richards & Farrell 2005).

In helping develop cooperative CoPs in IELE, I believe, a better choice would be for the leadership to employ more encouraging rather than "pushing and pulling" methods to support teachers. At the same time, IELE is expected to create a favorable environment for teachers' autonomy in professional development while offering immediate help to their individual needs.

These aspects are to be considered by both IELE teachers and IELE leadership in further implementing the program. Teacher development, if successful, could contribute in five dimensions to institutional improvement, namely, collegiality, research, site-specific information, curriculum initiatives, and instructional initiatives (Joyce 1991, cited in Richards & Farrell 2005). Reciprocally, a teaching innovation program based on the need for institutional improvement should help teachers develop professionally. A successful teacher education program at an institution should combine teachers' long-term development with institutional improvement. These initiatives are to support each other in a mutually reinforcing manner.

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Appendix

Questionnaire on IELE Teaching Innovation and Teacher Education Program (Adapted from Johnston et al.: 2005)

I.   **Life stories:**
1. What did you do in life before you became a member of IELE?
2. Tell something important about your life since you came into IELE. (E.g., what significant events have taken place in your personal life? What have been the most important turning points in your professional life? etc.)
3. How do you see the next 5 years of your life, both professionally and personally? What are your goals?

II.   **Teacher Knowledge:**
1. To what extend did the IELE teacher education program benefit you for the work you have done at IELE? What should have been covered but wasn't? What were the most useful components of the program?
2. What have you learned since you came into IELE, either formally or informally?
3. How do you describe "what you know" about teaching (i.e., your knowledge of being an English teacher) at present?

III.   **Teacher development:**
1. What forms of professional development have you found most useful in the period since you came into IELE? Tell of your experience of professional development.
2. What are your goals for learning and for professional development for the future?

IV.   **Identity (self-awareness and self-disposition, etc.)**
1. How do you identify yourself? What identity or identities are most important to you?
2. Do you see yourself as a good teacher?
3. Do you see yourself as a professional in teaching?

V.   **Sociopolitical context (from state policies to the school culture)**
1. What social and political contexts (in both narrow and broad senses) have you been involved with since you came into IELE?