

The Special Challenges of Teaching Lower-level Freshman English

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INTRODUCTION

Our essential research question was the following: What are the special challenges of teaching lower-level Freshman English (FE) classes at Asia University (AU)? No formal orientation for Visiting Faculty Members (VFMs) is currently conducted at the Center for English Language Education (CELE) to answer this question. As the VFMs teaching the two lowest FE levels this year, we felt the need to research this question. We hope our research will begin to discover some answers in order to help institutionalize material on this topic at CELE for current and future VFMs teaching at the lower levels.

Regarding FE levels, students are placed into AU's twenty-two FE levels according to their scores in the Freshman English Placement Test (FEPT) administered at the beginning of each academic year. Advanced is the highest, followed, from high to low, by Level 1 through Level 21.

For our research, we ranked the levels based on a widely accepted scale of language-learning proficiency. After identifying the lower FE levels, we interviewed the VFMs who teach this year's four lowest levels. We

synthesized the results of these interviews, and drew conclusions regarding our research question. We also suggest areas for further research.

METHODOLOGY

In our initial review of the EFL literature, we discovered a dearth of information defining lower-level classes such as ours. To help us define “lower-levels,” we referred to the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) Proficiency Guidelines 1986 (Shrum and Glisan). These guidelines cover the four main skill areas of language learning--speaking, listening, reading and writing. They rank language proficiency in categories by describing student ability levels. The following categories are used: Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior (a higher category, “Distinguished,” is added under listening and reading skills). We chose “Novice” to describe the lower-level FE classes.

Because speaking and listening skills are emphasized in AU FE classes, we selected these skills from the ACTFL Guidelines. Since the guidelines were too dense for our purposes, we simplified them. Then we turned our versions of the guidelines into two questionnaires--one for speaking and one for listening (see Appendices A and B). The questionnaire described speaking and listening proficiency skills on scales from Novice to Superior.

Using the questionnaires , VFMs ranked their FE classes by English speaking and listening proficiency according to the ACTFL Guidelines. VFMs teaching all twenty-two levels of FE classes answered the questionnaires, evaluating the overall abilities of their classes. Those classes which VFMs evaluated as Novice were defined as the lower levels for the purposes of our study.

We found that VFMs teaching levels 21 through 18 ranked their classes' proficiencies in the Novice range for both listening and speaking skills. Level 17 was ranked high enough into the Intermediate range as to denote a break-off point. Therefore, for our research, we defined FE levels 21 through 18 as the lower levels.

THE INTERVIEWS AND THEIR RESULTS

The four VFMs who were interviewed include the authors. As the teachers of this year's two lowest FE levels, our abstention from our own study would have been counterproductive. Genie Hughes teaches Level 21. She has taught lower-level FE for three years. Mark Connolly teaches Level 20. He has taught lower-level FE for two years. Robert Blaisdell teaches Level 19. This is his first year teaching lower-level FE. Kurt Weaver teaches Level 18. He has taught lower-level FE for two years.

The authors developed nine questions based on our own experience (see Appendix C). We worded the questions to help the VFMs explore and

describe the experiences that they believe make teaching the lower levels of FE different from teaching higher levels. The questions focused on the following areas:

- Stumbling blocks
- Student needs
- Working with the texts
- Meeting CELE goals
- Summarizing the special challenges
- Advice to future teachers.

Below are summaries of VFM recorded interviews discussing these six areas. The summaries contain some of the interviewees' own words, but are essentially paraphrased from the recordings, conveying the gist of the VFMs' answers.

Stumbling Blocks

The VFMs described several stumbling blocks in the lower-level FE classes. Though some of these may exist in FE at all levels, they persist in the lower levels, thus making teaching a special challenge. We identified five major stumbling blocks from the interviews: unresponsiveness, problems with basic communicative abilities, uncertain motivation, attitude, and being unaccustomed to participation.

Unresponsiveness

Several of the VFMs mentioned student unresponsiveness as one of the special challenges of teaching at the lower levels. Mark called it student

quietness, or their disinterest in participating, as one of his initial impressions. He said he sometimes asks students questions and gets no response at all. He can't tell whether they understand and don't want to try, or whether they don't understand but want to try. He can't tell anything by the students' lack of responsiveness. He thinks perhaps this reluctance to participate was due to the students' unfamiliarity with a Western-style classroom where participation was encouraged. To overcome their unresponsiveness, Mark uses structured activities that are repeated throughout the class text's units. Students become accustomed to participating within these structured activities.

Genie also cites student unresponsiveness. She said that when asking students if they understand, they may just look at the teacher or look at their desks, or they may simply say yes, even if they don't understand. She may tell students to start an activity, but they may just sit there and she realizes they don't understand. In addition, when students don't give any body language or verbal language to let her know that they do understand, she may explain a second or a third time, only to discover the students had complete understanding after the first explanation. As a result, she wastes class time re-explaining because the students wouldn't respond and let her know they understood all along. Genie tries a lot of techniques for overcoming unresponsiveness. Asking for some kind of signal such as a nod or a thumbs

up or down or saying okay are simple responses that the students learn to give that help her understand their comprehension during class.

This kind of unresponsiveness doesn't persist at higher FE levels, where students have higher listening and speaking skills.

Problems with basic communicative abilities

One of the special challenges of teaching the lower levels is the students' lack of basic communicative abilities, as described below. Students at higher levels generally can speak and listen to their teachers more easily, all but eliminating this as a classroom stumbling block.

Genie says that even after having taught the lower levels for a couple of years now, she is still surprised at her FE students' basic communicative abilities. When she asks students what she perceives to be very simple questions like, "What's your name?" or "Where are you from?", the students can answer. However, they can't initially answer such inquiries as "Tell me about your family?", "What's your hobby?", or "What do you do in your free time?"

This stumbling block also limits lower-level FE VFMs' abilities to carry on basic conversations with their students in English about important classroom procedures.

Identifying student motivation

VFM's also noted that another stumbling block at the lower level was identifying student motivation. Robert said he was surprised early in the first term by the apparent disorganization of many students. For example, students were late or not fully prepared for first-week placement interviews. He also found that he couldn't give students simple homework assignments to prepare for the next day's class and expect them to do it. He changed his expectations: Whereas he initially thought students could prepare a homework assignment in one or two days, he then allowed them one or two weeks, to compensate for a lack of motivation.

Kurt cites lack of motivation and lack of initiative on the part of some of his students. To address the problem, he says he learned to require and collect a lot of homework assignments to make the students feel accountable to the class and for their learning. His biggest surprise was students' attitudes towards learning. For example, students will focus on a task when the teacher announces a test. Overall, though, students don't see learning as a means of personal enrichment, he says. If there's no obvious consequence to learning -- earning points or passing a test -- students' attention just drifts. After hearing stories abroad about Japan's excellent educational system, Kurt says he thought there would be more students who were self-motivated about learning.

Genie points out that some students have been required to study English, without having an interest in studying English, in junior and senior high school. Then they get to university and they may still not want to study English.

Mark notes that some students are absent and come late for class too often, missing opportunities to participate in FE. By not participating, they fail to succeed in improving their English skills. All teachers in the FE program explain the attendance policy at the beginning of each term, spelling out very clearly the consequences of not attending class on time. Mark said he sees no particular personality-type or characteristic of students who repeatedly have poor attendance. At the halfway point in the term, Mark has his students calculate their grades and subtract points lost for poor attendance. He found that some students who could see the effects of their poor attendance on their grades improved their attendance in the second half of the term.

Although students at all FE levels may have problems associated with motivation, lower-level FE students are more likely to have had problems learning English in their educational pasts, and so are more likely to bring related motivational problems into their FE studies.

Attitude

Poor attitude can be another stumbling block. Kurt cites immaturity or an attitude of irresponsibility in some of his students. Two examples are students not being responsible for work they have missed, and pulling out cellular phones during class. He has had students walk into class late and continue to carry on cell-phone conversations. Kurt says some of this student attitude comes from their perceptions of Western teachers: Students may feel Western teachers don't deserve as much respect as Japanese teachers because of our tendency to break down formal barriers between teachers and students. For example, games are a part of our language teaching techniques, but students may not understand that this is sound pedagogy.

Genie says attitude can change over the course of the term, but not in all cases. She says it takes time for students to adjust to the Western classroom style, but whether they like it or not is another matter.

Robert cites what he perceives to be students' disrespectfulness. He says that one reason for this may be that students come to class with set expectations of what will happen and what the teacher/student roles will be, but the open exchanges and friendliness within his class are different from what they expect. Other factors that may be attributed to students pushing the boundaries of respectfulness are that students are coming into another level of adulthood, their attitude toward teachers, and the inculcated attitude

toward foreigners, he says. As a solution, he has cultivated more emotional distance with students outside of class.

Unaccustomed to participation

VFM's at all FE levels realize that their students are unaccustomed to the active participation style used in FE. This problem may be more difficult to overcome at the lower levels of FE, because it is compounded by other stumbling blocks such as student motivation, attitude and problems with basic communicative skills.

Genie described trying to get students out of the Japanese-style university classroom mode, which is very much lecture-oriented and passive. She said that teachers need to help students become accustomed to a communicative, Western-style class in which there's more movement, speaking, and interaction between the students and with the teacher.

Mark said that his students this year are lively and willing to immediately try an activity. However, last year, one problem was constant student inertia that made starting a new activity difficult and time-consuming.

Student needs

Students at the lower levels have some needs distinct from students at higher FE levels.

The need for structured language

Because lower level students come into FE with little or no basic communicative ability, VFMs need to give students a lot of structured language to use in class.

Mark says that students need structured language for basic communicative functions in class. He notes again that students aren't good at communicating whether or not they understand an activity when he explains it, or at some point in the middle of an activity if the students discover they don't understand. He tries to encourage students to use the structured Helpful English phrases (to help students ask basic questions) posted on his classroom wall. Though his students are succeeding in repeating and practicing structured phrases in the text, the unstructured nature of expressing their needs as they arise, by asking him questions, remains difficult. They may be nervous because they are speaking to the teacher, not their partner, and they may be uncertain that they are phrasing the English question correctly.

Kurt sees three types of students, all of whom have similar needs at his level. One has low self-esteem about their English abilities, but pretty good English skills nonetheless. The next has poor English skills but a good attitude and a willingness to try. Then there are those with poor English skills and low confidence. These groups all need a lot of structured speaking

practice. If Kurt asks students more open-ended questions, students get stuck. For the self-esteem issue, he creates a comfortable classroom environment in which students can feel free to make mistakes.

The need to feel comfortable learning English

Language learning improves if affective filters, such as anxiety in the classroom, are reduced. Genie says that students need to be comfortable in order to develop the ability to speak and to try to get their ideas across. Part of this is to overcome their fear of speaking English. She notes that although they have studied English for six years, when students are confronted with a native English speaker, the realization that they don't have the skills to communicate causes fear. She tries to help them feel comfortable and at ease, and to get them to just speak through gestures, one or two words, or with the help of their classmates, and they come to do that. She helps them to keep trying, and she makes it clear that she wants to understand her students.

Robert describes himself as a holist in his approach to learning. He cites rest and being in a toxin-free environment as needs for students. He says that because the water, air, food, and living environment in the Tokyo area are all toxified, the students are also toxified. In addition, he says that students are so overwhelmed by other factors such as long train commutes and part-time jobs that it's not uncommon for them to intermittently just pass out, or sleep, in class. He says the environment is the key thing that

students need to be supported in, but there's little he can do about that. To compensate, he tries to create a positive and novel classroom dynamic by varying his use of voice and actions and his presentation of materials, and this, in turn, keeps students interested.

Students' ability to communicate their own needs in class

As noted earlier in this paper, FE students at the lower levels have difficulty with basic communicative English. This includes communicating their needs in class.

Genie says that students are not very adept at communicating their needs, but eventually they do come to communicate them. Examples of needs are simple things like, "I wasn't in class yesterday," "I'm not going to be here tomorrow," "I don't have a paper," "Do we have homework? What is it? How do you do it?" Genie says that the first two years she taught FE, she handed out Helpful English phrases and posted the phrases in class, but this didn't work because she introduced fourteen phrases at once. She's had more success this year teaching about five phrases per semester and working with them. She also encourages and teaches gestures, accepts simple one and two word answers, and asks students to help each other. She comes to understand her students through being patient and not giving up on them.

For Mark also, one special challenge is the students' inability to communicate their needs to him in English. When he first started teaching

the lower levels, he was surprised to find out how little the students were able to communicate basic classroom needs, such as asking questions about activities or homework. To overcome their inability to express their needs, Mark also uses Helpful English phrases, reviews them, and posts them in the class. Students who want to try to communicate their needs to him find ways to do it, he said. They may raise their hand, or call his name, or say, "Help." If they need to speak to him before or after class, they may bring a friend from class who speaks better English than they do to help communicate. When the students do try to communicate their needs, Mark says he does come to understand them through gestures, broken phrases, or patient listening. He says that this challenge is ongoing and never completely overcome. The text doesn't offer classroom-based scenarios for practice, so it does not directly help to address this particular challenge.

Robert says his students can communicate immediate needs in his class. They may say, "Too hot--air conditioner," or "No paper--borrow paper." However, most students aren't able to communicate more complex needs such as an excuse for an absence. Robert speaks Japanese, and he uses it to provide help for students when new activities are presented and to facilitate understanding when English communication breaks down due to time constraints such as the bell ringing at the end of class. Robert also says that students are able to communicate to him when they don't understand something in class, but he has had to learn to recognize their signals. Side-

glances to their classmates, or inaction when Robert gives directions, are examples of signs that students don't understand.

Kurt noted two basic needs: Students are shy and they lack confidence, especially dealing with a foreigner in English, and overcoming basic language limitations. Again, Kurt said he tries to provide structured language practice and a comfortable classroom in order to help students with these needs. In terms of students' basic need to communicate before or after class, students have learned to approach Kurt with a classmate with better English skills and talk to him. If he sees some problem area in which a student needs help, he takes the initiative to approach the student. For communication in class, Kurt also has worked a lot with the Helpful English, and he says students are doing well with that.

Working with the texts

The four lower-level FE teachers use one of two texts as the core of their curriculum this year: *Firsthand Success* or *Firsthand One*.

Firsthand Success

Genie uses *Firsthand Success*. She says that it's very comfortable for her students to use. Though there are some difficult parts, the level is good for them. The activities are simple enough that she can adapt them in many ways. Genie hasn't supplemented the text much, just making up a game to

review part of a lesson, for example. She says the concepts in the book are good ones.

Mark uses *Firsthand Success*, too. He said that it seems to be the perfect text for his level. *Success* breaks activities down into do-able parts. The students learn the routine of each unit's activities and they become comfortable with it, he said. *Success* has great supplementary activities--a writing page, a unit quiz, and a communicative dictation activity, which are all well-integrated in each unit, so that he doesn't supplement the text in order to teach each unit.

Firsthand One

Robert says his class is fine using *Firsthand One*, and there is only a small percentage of the text he doesn't use. Instead of bringing in extra material to supplement the text, he supplements in the forms of language and activity simplifications. He says that the explanations in the text are too complex for students, so he must edit the book a lot to use it in class. If he didn't do this, it would take most of the class time just to explain how to do text activities.

Kurt uses *Firsthand One* also. It is bare bones, he says. He has to supplement at his level, which has turned into too much work. He estimates that fifty percent of the expansion activities in *Firsthand One* are not relevant to his class. He finds there's too little structure in those activities.

The text lacks vocabulary and activities to reinforce vocabulary learning. He tries to create or find pair activities to bring to class. For one unit, he may create three activities to help students recycle learned material. Because of all his effort to supplement *Firsthand One*, Kurt is considering switching texts to *Firsthand Success* next year, which has more supplemental activities.

Meeting CELE goals

All FE teachers are required to address the CELE Goals and Objectives in their classes. These include teaching the four skills areas, as well as improving language-learning skills and introducing topics on culture and critical thinking (Morrison and Paullin, 1997). Lower-level VFMs can find that meeting all of these goals constitutes a special challenge, which requires creating supplementary materials to bring to class.

Supplementing to meet CELE goals

For Robert, a challenge of teaching lower levels is dealing with trying to fit all of the FE goals and objectives into his FE courses, as well as dealing with the volume of busy-work and data-management that comes with this job. He said he's adjusting to these problems and will spend time smoothing them out. For meeting the culture goal, he had students become conscious of small cultural elements within their own lives. For example, he grouped students together and they had to learn what foreign countries each had visited and

what their favorite foreign movie and food was. Next term, he will build upon this awareness with videos, short readings, and presentations on culture.

Genie says her goal in FE is to get students over their fear of speaking English, and to get them to try to communicate. If they can't do that, then higher-sighted goals become irrelevant. She says the text doesn't help her to teach about culture and that she doesn't try to teach culture because the students don't possess enough English ability. She does, however, teach them about the culture of a Western-style classroom.

To achieve some of the FE goals, Mark is doing journal writing and a cultural unit using three American movies.

Kurt says he hasn't done too much to supplement the course for culture. For the critical thinking goal, he has structured some activities to practice critical thinking. Additionally, he says that just walking into his class, and learning to meet the challenges of getting and following instructions in English, are exercises in critical thinking. Beyond these, he hasn't really tried to supplement the course. He notes that FE is a skills class, and he's just trying to get the students up to snuff on language.

CONCLUSIONS

Summarizing the special challenges

Two of our interview questions allowed VFMs to summarize their views on our basic research question and to offer advice based on their experiences teaching FE at the lower levels. Here are the VFMs' answers.

Overcoming reticence

Though an attitude of reticence exists in varying degrees at all levels, Genie says that it becomes a special challenge at the lower levels. She says she thinks the biggest challenge is getting students to realize that they're not incapable, even though they are at the lowest FE level. Getting students to realize they can communicate in English is another challenge along with the patience that teachers must have to keep working with students' slow, lower-level progress.

Breaking tasks into small, manageable parts

Because students' basic communicative abilities are lower than students at higher levels, Mark says teachers' explanations of lessons and how to do things need to be expressed in simpler language, repeated in a non-boring way, and broken into small tasks that are easy for students to understand. In doing this, a habit of success can be built: students are helped to achieve the larger goal by accomplishing the smaller parts. Also, teachers need to find ways to overcome students' lack of motivation and their

hesitancy to ask questions and tell teachers when they don't understand. These types of problems exist to a lesser degree at the higher levels.

Activating student English

Students' command of the language defines how deeply Robert can get into material. He tries to activate the English they already know, and he gives them class time to use the English they have already learned. He has spent a lot of time putting information on the board and explaining lessons in great detail. His students lack acute listening skills and a broad vocabulary base to be able to understand questions. These limitations inhibit students from carrying on extended conversations that students at a higher level would be able to do.

Maintaining good classroom energy

One special challenge for Kurt is that it's very difficult to keep a good energy level in class because student progress is so slow. Therefore, it's difficult to show students that they have indeed made progress. Some students may be discouraged because they can't see how much they have improved, and some may not gain the motivation to keep trying. Another special challenge is that students don't believe in their ability to learn English, or they don't want to learn English.

Advice to Future Teachers

Below is some advice to future VFMs teaching at the lower levels.

Build student confidence

Genie says not to give up on the students, but to continue to believe that they can do it. Give them the tools to communicate, and then let them try to communicate. Speak slowly and repeat as often as necessary, and give the students the bare bones of what they need to succeed at this level of FE. Give them a familiar repertoire of activities so that they become comfortable in class. Be consistent.

Meet students at their level

If new VFMs come in with little or no experience in teaching lower levels, Mark suggests explaining and modeling things several times from several different angles. Find ways to assess student understanding or lack of understanding, even when you might not think it's a problem. Break activities into really small pieces, and when those aren't working, break those into even smaller pieces. When you are frustrated that students aren't understanding, stand back, take a breath, and break your lesson into such small pieces that you can't even imagine they need to be that small. Don't be frustrated by the slow pace and step-by-step approach that the lower levels need. Just keep breaking things down into smaller and smaller pieces, take

your time, and teach your lessons that way. You'll be less frustrated, and they'll get the lesson. Be really patient. Be ready to adjust your expectations, and be very satisfied when they make any progress. Any and all progress should be very satisfying.

Go at students' pace

Robert says to go slowly. Expect to use plenty of time, and understand the pace at which the students can learn. Understand what the students are willing to get and what they want to get. Many students are not great at academics, and language and English are not their strengths. They may feel they don't need English, so they don't want it. Adjust expectations about what you are going to teach them, and what makes you feel satisfied. Understand that the classroom environment in Building Three (where FE is taught) is sterile and hot and stuffy in summer. He says he has only a small percentage of students who are intrinsically motivated, attentive, and actively participating language learners. Also, be aware that students have a different cultural experience of learning through the education system. Finally, he also says that they are a great bunch of kids.

Keep individual tasks simple

Kurt's advice is to keep tasks simple. Make the directions short and clear. Use a variety of activities, modalities, games, music and videos to break up the class and keep it interesting. Pay attention to classroom dynamics over the course of the term, and give students a break with these various activities. Go slowly and thoroughly through your material. It doesn't matter so much if you don't cover everything. Just do what you do well. Kurt says he has whipped himself thinking that because progress is slow, he isn't doing enough, so be kind to yourself as a teacher. It's hard to evaluate how you're doing, but when you see students on campus, and they are willing to come up and try to say something to you in English, that's progress.

Suggestions for Further Research on the Topic

Not all of the VFMs' answers to our interview questions fit neatly into a consensus summary. We are four different teachers, with four different backgrounds, and our differences of opinion add to, rather than detract from, the whole answer to our basic research question: What are the special challenges of teaching lower-level FE?

We consider our research topic as one that needs to be continually explored and reevaluated through research conducted over a longer period of time. It is our hope that future VFMs will not only benefit from the

conclusions of this one-year, limited study, but that some teachers will continue to ask VFMs at the lower levels these and other questions so that a clearer consensus can appear.

We also recommend that VFMs at CELE examine the ACTFL Guidelines as a means of understanding the language proficiency skills of our students at all levels.

References

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Appendix A

Below are two abilities scales: one for Speaking and one for Listening. These scales are based on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. As you read down, the scales progress from **Novice** to **Advanced** or **Superior**.

Directions: Please read the Speaking Skills and Listening Skills pages. Place checks next to those items which describe your overall FE classes' abilities. Please *consider the general level of your classes as a whole* when placing your checks along the scale.

ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for Speaking Skills

From NOVICE...

Classes. . .

- have essentially no functional communicative ability.
- can only produce isolated words and a few high-frequency learned phrases.
- can rarely produce more than two or three isolated words, yet have a higher quantity of learned phrases.
- frequently repeat interlocutor's words.
- can ask questions/make statements involving learned material.
- can ask/answer questions on tasks of immediate need.
- can maintain face-to-face conversation in a highly restricted manner.
- can generally be understood through repetition, though misunderstandings frequently arise.
- can ask/answer questions in simple conversations beyond most immediate needs.
- can talk simply about self and family.
- struggles to create appropriate language forms.
- can generally be understood by sympathetic interlocutors.
- can initiate, sustain, and close a general conversation.
- utilize communicative strategies, but with evident errors.
- may still hesitate due to limited vocabulary.
- can generally be understood, but may still require repetition.
- can handle everyday situations and routine school requirements.
- can talk casually about topics of current public and personal interest.
- exhibit communicative strategies, such as pause fillers, stalling devices, different rates of speech, and circumlocution.
- can be understood without difficulty.
- can handle requirements of a broad variety of everyday and school situations.
- show ability to support opinions, explain in detail, hypothesize, and paraphrase.
- use vocabulary and intonation to communicate fine shades of meaning.
- show remarkable fluency and ease of speech.
- may not be able to tailor language to audience or discuss in depth highly abstract or unfamiliar topics.

- command a wide variety of interactive and discourse strategies.
- can distinguish main ideas from supporting information.

...To ADVANCED/SUPERIOR..

*Your Law class level is



Appendix B

ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for **Listening Skills**

These guidelines assume that all listening tasks take place in an authentic environment at a normal rate of speech using standard or near-standard norms.

From NOVICE...

Classes...

- essentially have no ability to comprehend even short utterances.
- can understand the occasional isolated word.
- can understand some short, learned utterances within context, when speech is clearly
- audible.
- require long pauses for assimilation.
- periodically request repetition and/or a slower rate of speech.
- can comprehend simple questions and answers, and high-frequency commands.
- may require repetition, rephrasing and/or slowed rate of speech for comprehension.
- can understand sentence-length utterances in a limited number of content areas such as basic personal background and needs, social conventions and routine tasks such as receiving simple instructions and directions, particularly if supported within context.
- understanding is often uneven; repetition and rewording may be necessary.
- can understand more complex tasks, such as lodging, transportation, and shopping.
- can understand additional content areas including some personal interests and activities, and a greater diversity of instructions and directions.
- listening abilities are extended to short routine telephone conversations, simple announcements and media reports.
- continue to have uneven understanding.
- can sustain understanding over longer stretches of connected discourse on a number of topics pertaining to different times and places.
- understanding is inconsistent due to failure to grasp main ideas and/or details.
- can understand main ideas and most details of connected discourse on a variety of topics beyond the immediacy of the situation such as interviews, short lectures on familiar topics, and new items and reports primarily dealing with factual information and narration in different time frames or aspects.
- can understand the main ideas of most speech in a standard dialect.
- may not be able to sustain comprehension in extended discourse which is
- linguistically complex.

- show an emerging awareness beyond the surface meanings but may fail to grasp nuances.
- can follow the essentials in lectures, speeches, and reports.
- show some appreciation of idioms, colloquialisms, and register shifting.
- rarely misunderstand but may not understand excessively rapid, highly colloquial or speech that has strong cultural references.

...To ADVANCED/SUPERIOR.

** Your Law class level is

Appendix C

Interview Questions

- 1) Think back to when you first walked into your FE class. What were your initial impressions of your students? What was your biggest surprise?
- 2) Over the course of the semester/year, what did you find to be the three biggest stumbling blocks in working with your students? How did you deal with them?
- 3) In general, what do you perceive to be the most prominent areas of need for your students? How do you address those needs?
- 4) Are your students able to communicate their needs to you in class? If not, how do you come to understand them?
- 5) The text is a big part of the FE class. How well are your students able to work within your chosen text?
- 6) Do you supplement the text in any way? Why/why not? If yes, where and in what ways?
- * Are you supplementing to meet the CELE goals and objectives? How?
- 7) What do you think the special challenges of teaching students at your level are as opposed to higher levels?
- 8) Now that you have been at this for a bit, what advice can you give to future VFM at your FE level?
- 9) Anything else?

* Though not contained in the initial list of interview questions, this question was added at the time of the interview and subsequently asked of all interviewees.