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Exploring the Assessment Aspect of Differentiated Instruction:
College EFL Learners' Perspectives on
Tiered Performance Tasks

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
In
The Department of Curriculum and Instruction

By

Yeh-uh Hsueh Chen

B.A., National Chengchi University, Taiwan, 1980
M.Ed., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1988

December 2007

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To my loved ones:
My husband, Chun-chi,
My son, Eric
My daughter, Constance,
My parents, Mr. Tung-pi and Mrs. Yang Huan Hsueh,
And
Teachers who devote their wisdom, lives, and care
To their students' all-around development.

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ABSTRACT

If human beings are believed to be individually unique, why are students evaluated with standardized tests? Differentiated instruction, honoring individual differences of each learner, provides an alternative answer to the question by employing tiered performance tasks to address personal needs in assessment situations. To explore the applicability of differentiated instruction in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment, this case study explored Taiwanese college students' perspectives on tiered performance tasks and educational implications of the perspectives with regard to EFL learning and teaching at the tertiary level.

Grounded in the humanistic stance of education and sociocultural view of learning, the study's premise is that culturally responsive learner-centered instruction will promote English learning experience in a Chinese context. Data gathering techniques employed included observations, interviews, videotaping, and artifact collection, while data analysis procedures followed a three-step process: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

A total of 12 participants demonstrated generally positive responses to tiered performance tasks offered in a final examination for a freshmen English listening and speaking class. An overall acceptance of the assessment strategy was generated through recognition and appreciation of choices of leveled tasks, heightened motivation, increased efforts, improved English skills, and greater confidence. Concerns caused by the challenging tasks included complexity level, time required to complete the task, partnership, and score. Affirmative results were particularly evident in low-ranking students.

The acceptance of tiered performance tasks indicated that differentiated instruction is promising in supporting English language learning of college EFL learners in Taiwan.

Implications pointed to the needs of an authentic assessment to link teaching and learning, as well as an equitable relationship between the educator and the learner. Suggestions for future research were offered.

Keywords: tiered performance tasks, differentiated instruction, assessment, ESL/EFL,
Taiwan, college learners

PRELUDE

In teaching his disciples, Confucius was known to promote instruction according to the student's ability or aptitude as reflected in the Chinese phrase ‘因材施教’ [to teach according to the student's ability or aptitude]. The saying has been a frequently heard description of Confucian education ever since I was an elementary school student, and I believe it has been the same for previous generations of Chinese. The expression was so familiar to me that it lost its meaning, becoming an empty slogan. Since Confucius was an ancient sage and a great educator thousands of years ago, I had never expected his way of teaching would be relevant in modern educational practices in Taiwan.

I grew up in an age when students learned *the same thing in the same way on the same day*. None of my teachers talked, to the best of my knowledge, about differentiated instruction in accordance with learner differences. As far as I can remember, all my formal education was delivered in a teacher-centered manner in large classes of 45-55 students. Official uniform textbooks were used until 1996. Students passively received instruction, rather than actively constructing knowledge, because little or no interaction occurred between the teacher and students or among students in class. Rote memorization is a long-established practice in Chinese education systems, especially in language acquisition (Hird, 1995). I used to listen to my English teachers read the textbooks and tried very hard to imitate their pronunciation by myself after class. Rarely was I called on to read a sentence or answer a question in English class, and it always caused me great anxiety when it did happen.

When I was in college, majoring in English literature was my focus. I enjoyed the beauty of the Western literary canonical works as well as cultures, but English conversation class was still mostly spent listening to either the instructor or a few outspoken peers; very limited chances were provided to engage in oral practice. It was no surprise, then, that my

classmates and I would generally remain silent even when instructed to discuss certain topics in small groups. It seemed to me that English was basically a language to read and to write in, or to listen to, but not to communicate in, at least, not for me.

Because all typical students in my time were taught using the same materials, evaluation was in a uniform format concerned exclusively with retrieval of memorized information, instead of real-life application. In English tests, I had multiple-choice questions, fill in the blanks, spelling, sentence construction, and short essays. I only remember two or three times, during my four college years, where I was asked to deliver a brief speech or perform a short play in English. This was in a conversation class taught by a young instructor who had just obtained his master's degree from an American university. Other than that, most of the time, I endeavored meticulously to master pronunciation, to memorize words, and to analyze grammatical structures; all these resulted in fragmented and short-lived knowledge of English. My generation was used to receiving the same prescribed instruction over the same time span, taking the same examinations for which we tried to deliver back the same information. In achieving this, my peers and I thought we were academically successful, meeting the standardized criteria that were imposed on all of us. Nobody anticipated differentiated instruction to meet our diversified needs and learning preferences. We felt at that time that we were similar to one another and we were taking similar routes heading toward similar life goals. After all, we were all from the products of a uniform manufacturing process in education.

In 1985, for the first time in my life, I left Taiwan Island and came to the United States. While I was waiting outside of the airport for my friend to pick me up, a stranger from the opposing direction greeted me amiably: "Hi, how y' doing?" I opened my mouth in an attempt to return the courtesy, but failed to sound out anything sensible except for a blurred

“Hi!” in a voice only loud enough for myself to hear. To hide my embarrassment, I looked away with a frozen smile, and quickly cast down my eyes. “What’s the matter with you?” I reprimanded myself. “You’re an English major, and you can’t respond to such a friendly everyday greeting!” Worrying how I could survive my stay in America, not to mention obtaining a master’s degree, with such poor communication skills, I was totally disappointed in myself.

This was only a beginning of a series of similar scenarios in the years to come. It may sound trivial, and it probably escaped the mind of that man who greeted me seconds after he passed by me. He probably thought I was simply a rude Asian girl. Almost anyone who had a similar experience would have instantly erased the memory. However, it stays in my recollection after all these years. In retrospect, I speculate what would have been at the core of my response. Was it jet lag? Shyness? Stress? Anxiety? Lack of oral practice? My English education? Cultural differences? Perhaps it was a combination of everything.

Unexpectedly, about six years ago I started my teaching career in a university where I was amazed how individually different my students were. Some of them were born with silver spoons in their mouths; some had to earn their own tuitions and livings from junior high school onward. The reasons they chose the Department of Applied Foreign Languages were due to family needs, job preparation, some simply because of proximity, but few for genuine interest. Naturally, the proficiency levels were also varied over a wide range. Yet, the prevailing teaching practice in Taiwan’s educational framework was not much different from what I knew. For years, I had tried out a variety of teaching methods suggested by pedagogical experts in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). I attended various workshops, seminars, conferences and discussion groups in search of possible ways of teaching that attend to learner uniqueness and learning preferences. Most of the ‘recipes’ I

tried sought to advance students' communicative competence in an actively engaging atmosphere and did bring forth significant results. However, the effect was neither consistent nor prolonged, and there were still some students whom I felt unable to reach. It appeared that the occasional feasts I put out on the table temporarily satisfied most of my students' appetites, but the dishes were not prepared to suit each learner's taste, and the menu was not sufficiently diversified to provide something for everyone to enjoy. I was pleased to see the general enthusiasm promoted in the class, but I knew it was not exactly what I was looking for. I expected to see something coming from within my students—an inner drive that was sustainable in the pursuit of life-long learning.

My search was not fruitful until the second semester of my doctoral program in the spring of 2006 when I learned about differentiated instruction and tiered performance tasks. Before that, Confucius' ideas of differentiation and inspiring teaching methods were only an over-used proverb by a great ancient educator which did not resonate with me. The deeper I dove into the American-rooted approach of differentiated instruction, the clearer I saw Confucius' image reflected in it. Long forgotten and perhaps purposefully neglected by modern Chinese in general, the Confucian spirit of education, now emerging within Western educational theories, had come to life in the United States.

I finally realized that respect for individual needs and freedom of making personal choices are patent aspects of human beings and must be maintained beyond cultural barriers, either in the East or the West, in ancient times or modern, in science or in education. I therefore took on the task of seeking how differentiated instruction can be put into practice in the field of my passion—Teaching English as a Foreign Language—in a Chinese context. Hopefully, the universal principle of acknowledging individuality will illuminate brightly, as it used to 2500 years ago, in a society that is long-laden with collectivism, starting with a tiny

corner in the small island of Taiwan. This is my choice of tiered performance task, based on my readiness level and preference.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This study was an initial exploration into the potential of differentiated instruction in an EFL context to provide opportunities for all students to achieve successful English language learning. In this beginning chapter, I present various components of the study: the background, the statement of the problem, the theoretical framework, the purpose of the study, and the significance of the research. Then, I discuss issues of bias and the delimitations of the study. Finally, I provide definitions of terms, the chapter summary, and the organization of the study.

Background of the Study

Increasing Diversity

Nowadays English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) classrooms display unprecedented diversity. As English becomes a dominant global language, mastery of English develops into a universal imperative for people from all walks of life. ESL/EFL teachers are expected to attend to various needs of students that are different in every possible aspect. Research documents that optimal learning is likely to occur when students are motivated and their needs are attended to (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Gardner, 1985). However, in typical EFL classrooms teacher-fronted grammar-translation method is the norm (Nunan, 2003; Yang, 2000). Especially, college students are often from a wide array of backgrounds, yet little corresponding adjustment is made in the way college courses are usually taught (Ernst & Ernst, 2005). In common college practice, students scarcely get individual attention from the instructor. The mission of addressing individual student needs is even more difficult to accomplish in ESL/EFL settings with large class enrollments. It is no

surprise, then, despite the considerable investment many EFL countries have made in English education for years, that satisfactory English proficiency in students is generally not observed (Nunan, 2003). The discouragingly low English proficiency of college students in technological and vocational institutions has caught much attention in Taiwan (Lin, 1997).

Teaching to the Test

A growing number of researchers report that traditional methods of language-teaching fail to encourage sustained and holistic English learning (see Babcock, 1993; Liu, 2005). More than 80 percent of English teachers in Taiwan adopt the grammar-translation method due to potent, negative influence from traditional paper-and-pen examinations (Liao, 2007). Most of these EFL teachers over-emphasize reading and grammar, while ignoring other language skills and thus fostering unsuccessful language learners. Bruner (1960) has once commented that an examination “can be bad in the sense of emphasizing trivial aspects of a subject...encouraging teaching in a disconnected fashion and learning by rote” (p. 30).

Tests from early in the century, developed from a behaviorist perspective and a concern with equity, emphasized rote recall to an astonishing degree (Gipps, 1999; Shepard, 2000). Various testing types—recall, completion, matching, and multiple-choice—were all tied closely with what was deemed important to learn. Roos and Hamilton (2004) find it still true that curriculum content often describes the expected capabilities of students in specified areas and curriculum is at its best a sequence of separate content units; full command of each may be accomplished as a single act. Such *unit* conception of subject matter expects students to master each skill at the desired level without considering individual differences and preferred learning styles. Assessment developed from this view of knowledge results in a closed door on long-lasting and meaningful learning.

Assessment not only influences attainment, but also affects learning identity (Ecclestone & Pryor, 2003). Unfortunately, current assessment implementation in many countries does not appear hopeful. Black and Wiliam (2001) disclosed that in the United Kingdom and elsewhere as well the everyday practice of assessment in classrooms is plagued with problems concerning effective learning that lead to an impact. Their research indicated that even enthusiastic teachers administer tests that encourage rote and superficial learning but are unaware of it. In addition, Reay and Wiliam (1999) pointed out that social consequences of the use of test results add needless pressure to all the students, regardless of ability level. Low achievers are especially de-motivated by poor test scores, which imply a lack of learning ability, even worse, a dismal linkage to future hardships. Well aware of effects of high stakes tests, Reay and Wiliam's student participants, as young as 10 or 11, defined themselves in terms of test scores. As a result, strong currents of fear and anxiety about failure were generated in test conditions feeding the worry about doing badly in tests. It seems universal that students are suffering from poor assessment practice that affects learner identity and self-esteem.

On the other hand, teachers complain that assessing students' learning is a difficult task. For example, in language arts, traditional tests are unsuccessful in measuring all-around communicative competence, only measuring language skills rather than students' ability to use language in authentic ways (Tompkins, 2002). Because educators generally regard assessment not only as an opportunity to evaluate students' learning, but also a way to inform instructional decisions, Tompkins noted that "traditional assessment fails to use authentic language tasks or to help teachers find ways to help students succeed" (p. 68). This argument finds further support in that students learn English with low intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in test-oriented environments (Chung, 2000). Possible alternatives of teaching and assessment

that actively engage students in meaningful authentic English learning activities are a crucial need everywhere, including the United Kingdom, the United States, and Taiwan.

Differentiated Instruction Offering Tiered Performance Tasks

In the United States, a rising number of educators advocate a differentiated classroom in which students' educational experiences are driven by individual needs, interests, and abilities (e.g., Renzulli, Leppien, & Hays, 2000). As a student-centered approach, differentiated instruction aims to improve classroom learning for all students by employing a variety of classroom practices that accommodate student differences (Benjamin, 2002). There is mounting evidence of accomplishment in classrooms where differentiated instruction promotes higher motivation, provides more choices for learning, reduces behavioral problems, and maximizes durable learning (Nunley, 2006; Tomlinson, 1999, 2001; Yatvin, 2004).

Success of differentiated instruction in subject teaching such as reading, mathematics, biology, and ESL literacy instruction has been increasingly manifest in the literature (MacGillivray & Rueda, 2003; Nunley, 2006; Pierce & Adams, 2004). Differentiated instruction fits in the educational environment at large as an advocated alternative to traditional ability grouping in teaching heterogeneous classes (Braddock & Slavin, 1995) and as an effective way of providing all students equitable educational opportunities, as opposed to the much criticized practice of tracking (Hoffman, 2003; Strauser & Hobe, 1995).

A tiered performance task is one of the special features of differentiated instruction that develop ongoing interaction between assessment and instruction. Differentiated instruction utilizes diverse strategies to get a better fit for all students. Among these strategies, tiered performance tasks provide students adjustable choices to focus on essential skills and understand key concepts, while recognizing that they may be at different levels of readiness (Gregory & Chapman, 2002). Although the tasks are differentiated for different groups of

learners, the standards, concepts, or content of each assignment have the same focus and each student has the opportunity to choose the suitable depth and complexity of challenge. The secret is not in multiple versions of materials or tasks, rather as Yatvin (2004) explains, how students make varied use of the learning opportunities. According to Gregory and Chapman, when offered choices students become more engaged in building on prior knowledge and experiencing personal growth, because adjusting assignments provides a greater chance for students to work at a challenge that slightly exceeds his or her skill level. As an authentic alternative of assessment, tiered performance tasks promise valid information on students' understanding through activities adjusted to allow students focus on key concepts and skills but at different levels of complexity, abstractness, and open-endedness (Tomlinson, 1999).

Statement of the Problem

Although the practice of differentiated instruction has been increasingly documented, past studies have focused on its effectiveness in teaching essential content in general in American K-12 educational settings or in addressing learner needs in inclusive classrooms as well as in gifted programs. Little research has been conducted to discuss differentiation of English language teaching and learning in an ESL/EFL environment at the tertiary level (MacGillivray & Rueda, 2003; Hoover & Patton, 2005). Therefore, it remains an open question whether and how differentiated instruction can successfully assist college instructors in non-English speaking countries to accommodate diverse student needs.

In a study aiming to assess the practical and ethical concerns associated with learning and teaching in a differentiated setting in an American university, Ernst and Ernst (2005) conclude that differentiated instruction *can* be implemented at the college level. Nevertheless, they have also discussed challenges regarding the differentiation from a college instructor's perspective. Their concerns come from structural differences between tertiary and lower-level

classrooms, limited contact hours with students, large class size, time demands, and fairness issues. In another study, Linville's (2006) students demonstrated increased motivation mixed with concerns about fairness in her implementation of differentiated curriculum in a technological university in Panama. Although both studies by Ernst and Ernst and by Linville confirm the effectiveness of differentiated instruction at the college level, neither was conducted in an Asian EFL context, nor from the students' points of view.

As there are potential pitfalls in implementing differentiated instruction, caution needs to be taken while investigating areas of study in language learning. An EFL curriculum encompasses various aspects including the content, teaching activities, and assessment; all aspects truthfully reflect cultural influences (Y.-U. Chen, 2006). Given that researchers have acknowledged the promising facet and the time-consuming side of differentiated instruction at college level in general, it is sensible to begin the study of its applicability in EFL contexts on a small scale to reduce the pressure from time (Pierce & Adams, 2004; Tomlinson, 1999; Yatvin, 2004). Therefore, starting small from one single curriculum aspect seemed to be a practical option. Considering the influence of assessment on learning, the learners, teaching practice, even the society and local culture at large, I recognized the major significance of investigating how assessment measures in differentiated instruction enhance teaching and learning at the tertiary level in Taiwan. Tiered performance task, an innovative form of assessment widely administered in differentiated instruction, appeared to be a logical starting point for the study. Since college EFL learners in Taiwan have been identified as experiencing a narrowed version of instruction due to traditional examinations, how perspectives of this group of students on tiered performance tasks inform English learning and teaching required vigilant exploration to shed light on how differentiated instruction enhances EFL learning and teaching.

Theoretical Framework

As a student-centered approach that aims to improve learning for all students by employing a variety of classroom practices to accommodate differences in students' academic readiness, interests, learning profiles, and affective needs (Benjamin, 2002), differentiated instruction provides a general theoretical framework for this study. In a constantly changing era, differentiated instruction appears to be an educational philosophy as well as a teaching approach that assists educators in tackling various daily challenges brought by learner diversity. Given the nature of learner centrality and its ultimate goal of maximizing learning for each learner, differentiated instruction is humanistic in every sense.

A humanistic view of education takes on a learner-centered stance. Each learner must make meaning of what is taught to actually learn the material. Such a meaning-making process is crucially influenced by the learner's prior understandings, interests, learning preferences, beliefs, and attitudes about themselves and their school (Tomlinson, 2001). Paying attention to learner variances is placing the learner in the central position of educational process and undoubtedly the most effective way of acknowledging individual values. Tomlinson argued that attending to a variety of students' needs makes it possible for the best learning to take place.

In a humanistic orientation, the student-centered emphasis builds on the philosophical pillars of individual freedom, responsibility, and natural goodness (Elias & Merriam, 2005). The two authors explained how students grow in the humanistic learner-centered environment. Human beings, inherently good, are capable of making significant personal choices if given a loving environment and the freedom to develop. The teacher facilitates or guides the learning process, while the student identifies his/her own learning needs and assumes responsibility for learning by actively taking part in decision-making with regard to

content, process, objectives, and the environment. Also advocating a learner-centered education, Henson (2003) points out that the focus is upon learning rather than teaching and on the learner rather than on the instructor.

Differentiated instruction strives to help each learner develop to his/her fullest potential through enhanced motivation. Motivation has long been recognized as one of the strongest predictors of success (Gass & Selinker, 2001). Learning theorists indicate four aspects in motivated students: a reason for learning, a desire to attain the learning goal, a positive attitude toward learning, and effortful behavior (Gardner, 1985; Ngeow, 1998). In humanistic education, the learner is provided opportunities to take ownership in learning. When making choices for one's own learning, one is held accountable, and at the same time feels a kinship with, interest in, or passion for what is being learned and motivation is thus increased (Nunley, 2006; Piaget, 1978; Tomlinson, 2001). Recognizing the relationship between motivation and learning, Bruner (1960) suggested that one of the best steps a teacher can take to facilitate learning success is providing learners with the motivation to learn. In *The Process of Education*, he stated: "The best way to create interest in a subject is to render it worth knowing, which means to make the knowledge gained usable in one's thinking beyond the situation in which learning has occurred" (p. 31).

In addition, differentiated instruction adheres to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and constructivist view of learning on the whole (George, 2005; Tomlinson, 1999, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978). Tomlinson reminded us that learning occurs when a learning experience pushes the learner a bit beyond his or her independence level. A teacher who differentiates instruction matches the learning materials to a student's capacity to master while offering an appropriately challenging level of complexity, so as to stretch the learner's ability, but not to cause detrimental frustration (MacGillivray & Rueda, 2003). Besides, in differentiated

instruction learning occurs in a chain, so that students can build the new information on their prior knowledge, thus learning is sustainable (Aida, 1994; Nunley, 2006; Tse, 2000; von Glaserfeld, 2000).

Scholars assert affective advantages in differentiated instruction as well. In general, learners in a regular heterogeneous classroom are likely to realize gains in peer acceptance and social skills (George, 2005). George further states that the more one type of learner interacts with others, the more all students emphasize their similarities as persons rather than their differences, thus the best kind of interpersonal tolerance thrives. Differentiating teachers proactively and reactively support the affective climate of the classroom (Tomlinson & Eidson, 2003). Some of the measures the two authors list as taken to attend learner affective needs include modeling and teaching about and for respect, helping students examine multiple perspectives on important issues, ensuring consistently equitable participation of every student, seeking and responding to legitimate opportunities to affirm each student. Specific to an EFL classroom differentiated instruction builds up students' confidence and self-esteem in foreign language ability via constant genuine encouragement, reassurance, positive reinforcement, and empathy (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). In other words, a caring and supportive climate in the EFL classroom alleviates foreign language anxiety (Ito & Chen, 2007; Krashen, 2003).

As a recap, the five premises underpinning a learner-centered education model suggested by Henson (2003) serve to describe the theoretical foundation of differentiated instruction:

1. Learners have distinctive perspectives or frames of reference that are formed by their backgrounds, interests, goals, and beliefs.

2. Learners have unique differences such as emotional states of mind, learning rates, learning styles, stages of developments, abilities, talents, feelings of efficacy, and other needs. This premise associates closely with Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, which will be discussed in Chapter Two (Gardner, 1993; Reiff, 1997).
3. Learning occurs best when perceived as relevant and meaningful by the learner and when the learner is actively engaged in constructing understanding by connecting the new information with prior knowledge and experience. Apparently, the vision connects to the constructivist tradition set by Dewey (1963), Piaget (1963), Vygotsky (1978), Bruner (1960), and von Glaserfeld (2000). More discussion on these learning constructs and their theories is also available in Chapter Two.
4. Learning occurs best in an environment where positive interpersonal relationships and interaction are encouraged. Research has shown supporting results that constructive social interaction is beneficial to growth in every aspect, including language acquisition (e.g. Hsu, 2004; Gass & Selinker, 2001).
5. Learning is seen as a fundamentally natural process; learners are viewed as naturally curious and basically interested in learning about and mastering their world.

Humanism's emphasis upon the autonomous learner in the educational process supports a strong sense of responsibility both to the self and to other people. As Dewey (1964) described, "I believe that all education proceeds by the participation of the individual in the social consciousness of the race" (p. 169). A humanistic learner-centered education

encourages members of a society to acquire knowledge for the development of full personal potential for the betterment of humanity.

In support of humanistic differentiated instruction in EFL classrooms, a culturally responsive EFL curriculum needs to be in place (Au, 2006). Language and culture are interrelated and the EFL learners carry influences from their native culture into the classroom; therefore, EFL curriculum needs to be, in essence, culturally sensitive. By acknowledging the learners' cultural heritage the EFL curriculum is humanistic and thus sets the stage for implementation of differentiated instruction.

Assessment, an indispensable part of instruction, is inevitably socio-cultural. To be more precise, assessment itself is a social activity that can only be understood by taking account the social and cultural context involved (Gipps, 1999). Similarly, Gipps extended her argument to express that the way students respond to assessment depends on social and cultural influences, too. Then, for an assessment measure to be effective in evaluating attainment and informing teaching, it has to be able to reflect the cultural characteristics of the assessed. The assessment strategy of tiered performance tasks in differentiated instruction is innately culturally responsive for it takes learner uniqueness into primary consideration. This attribute reinforces the capability of differentiated instruction to fit into educational contexts beyond American boundaries. In particular, I was inspired by a connection between differentiated instruction and Confucian educational philosophy which heightened the potential of differentiated instruction in a Chinese society. This peculiar relationship will be elaborated in Chapter Two.

Purpose of the Study

This study explored influences of tiered performance tasks on college EFL learners in Taiwan—how their perspectives on the innovative differentiated assessment are shaped and

what educational implications are, in relation to English learning and teaching. The assessment aspect of EFL curriculum was chosen for attentive exploration under the broad inquiry: Is differentiated instruction applicable in college EFL classrooms in Taiwan? There were two sub-questions specifically regarding the area of interest—tiered performance tasks:

1. What are college learners' perspectives on tiered performance tasks?
2. What are the implications of these perspectives to EFL learning and teaching?

To serve the purpose of the current research, a case study was employed as the method of investigation. Data gathering techniques included observations, interviews, videotaping, and artifact collection, while data analysis procedures followed a three-step process: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

Significance of the Study

As Yatvin (2004) pointed out, the practice of differentiated instruction has its roots in American soil; therefore, further knowledge on the applicability of differentiated instruction in an EFL classroom is imperative owing to the speedy expansion of English as a language of global communication. Moreover, exploration of how differentiated instruction can work in the specific educational context in Taiwan is particularly crucial since the English educators in Taiwan are confronting the multiple and simultaneous challenges of dealing with diversity of students' abilities and interests, covering test materials to improve students' standardized achievement levels, and updating themselves to be professionally adequate. Still more, as the greater-than-ever variance of ability is progressively more obvious in post secondary educational institutions, studies examining the influences of differentiated instruction on college EFL education enhance the understanding of its overall value, while complementing the existing knowledge that is limited to K-12 education for younger students in America.

I chose to explore the effectiveness of differentiated instruction in the form of tiered

performance tasks in improving assessment in a college EFL curriculum because of the widespread and profound impact of extensive examinations in English education in Taiwan over time. Findings of educational implications regarding assessment are especially relevant to Chinese society which has been test-oriented for generations. Besides, the relationship between differentiated instruction and Confucian educational philosophy provides additional grounds for the study. Confucius and his teaching ideology will be discussed in more detail in next chapter.

Areas of Bias

As a researcher, I brought several areas of bias to this study. First, and perhaps most importantly, I bring my cultural bias. As a researcher born and brought up in Taiwan, which has historical, political, and cultural connections with China, I view the world with a Chinese lens; everything I perceive and think of is shaped by my personal experience as a Chinese. I expected to see, in this study, the implications related to my cultural background.

I also brought the bias of having been a student who was educated both in the Chinese educational context that my participants were experiencing and in the higher education institutions in the United States. From an EFL background where I had been administered copious tests as a student, I inevitably held some preconceptions about assessment based on my personal experience. On the other hand, schooling for years in America constructed a contrasting perspective on student performance evaluation. Further, I carried the bias of an English instructor who had taught in the classic situation to the status quo of colleges in Taiwan as described in this study.

My attachment to the field of EFL might have led me to data that support my assumptions; my reception of data might have become selective—accepting what I agreed and rejecting what I did not (Glesne, 1999). Additionally, my personal beliefs in the

theoretical underpinnings has somewhat shaped my expectations and could have possibly affected my interaction with the participants as well, which could be reflected in the data analysis. However, I tried to stay alert to my own subjectivity and constantly examined myself for biases throughout the study by keeping notes to counteract this limitation. In addition, I listened for the emic voice that described insider perspectives (Merriam, 2001).

Delimitations

This case study, as a qualitative inquiry with a small group of participants chosen in a purposeful way, elicited findings which may describe situations useful to understanding similar situations in their specific contexts to similar situations, but not to a larger population. Due to time constraints and logistical restrictions, this study focuses on college students enrolled in the Department of Applied Foreign Languages in a technological university. Participants were selected from the students in a freshmen class in central Taiwan. These participants may not be representative across the nation or worldwide. Besides, the study was confined to one particular aspect of instruction; therefore, it is too bold to claim that the conclusions apply to EFL curriculum in general. In order to elicit the most possible responses from participants within the limited timeframe, I intentionally chose active and easy-going students for individual and focus group interviews, based on recommendations of the instructor. The influence of including a few quieter students would be difficult to predict.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of the present inquiry, the following terms are defined focusing on the meanings used in the study.

Assessment

In this study, the term 'assessment' is used in its general sense. "Assessment incorporates a wide range of methods for evaluating pupil performance and attainment,

including formal testing and examinations, practical and oral assessment, and classroom-based assessment carried out by teachers” (Gipps, 1999, p. 356). In most cases, the term assessment is interchangeable with examination, evaluation, or test. When discussing specific forms of assessment, I use specific terms (e.g., standardized tests, portfolio assessment).

Differentiated Instruction

A systematic way of instruction planned through understanding learner uniqueness and strategically adjusted delivery in at least four aspects of instruction: content, process, and product, and learning environment, in accordance with individual needs to foster optimal learning in each student (Tomlinson, 2000a).

EFL

English as a Foreign Language refers to teaching or learning English in an environment where English is not spoken as a native or primary language (e.g., French speakers learning English in France). This is most commonly done within the context of the classroom (Gass & Selinker, 2001).

ESL

English as a Second Language refers to teaching and learning English in an English-speaking environment (e.g., German speakers learning English in the United States) (Gass & Selinker, 2001). In an ESL context, the society outside of the classroom constantly exposes learners to authentic situations where they can practice, particularly with oral interaction, which also provides the additional challenges of listening comprehension (Hird, 1995).

Tiered Performance Tasks

Tiered performance tasks refer to activities adjusted so all students focus on key concepts and skills but at different levels of complexity, abstractness, and open-endedness. A performance task requires students to accomplish approximations of real-life, authentic tasks,

usually using the productive skills of speaking or writing but also using reading or writing or a combination of these skills. By focusing on the same essential understandings with opportunities to choose and try varying degrees of difficulty, the students are offered a greater chance to gain pivotal skills and understandings and are appropriately challenged. Performance assessments can take many forms such as essay writing, interview, problem-solving tasks, communicative pair-work tasks, role playing, and group discussions (Brown & Hudson, 1998; Tomlinson, 1999).

Chapter Summary

In a typical educational framework in Taiwan, students receive one-size-fits-all instruction through which they learn the same thing in the same way on the same day even though the student population displays increasing diversity. English learners in Taiwan generally do not develop satisfactory communicative competence due to conventional teaching modes and test-driven curriculum among other factors. Differentiated instruction has been applied in K-12 classrooms in the United States for decades and is successful in addressing individual needs to promote learning. This study sought to demonstrate that the application of differentiated instruction can promote English proficiency of college EFL learners in Taiwan and that an assessment strategy that accommodates individual differences will motivate students to develop to their potential.

A review of literature relevant to differentiated instruction and foreign language learning is presented in Chapter Two which attempts to provide a more in-depth definition as well as theoretical underpinning for differentiated instruction and to explain how the approach is promising in maximizing EFL learning and informing teaching.

Organization of the Study

There are six chapters in this dissertation preceded by a prelude which provides a sketchy description of my previous educational experience in a traditional Chinese system accounting for the urge to conduct the study. It also indicates a connection between American-rooted differentiated instruction and Chinese Confucian philosophy of teaching.

Chapter One is a bird's eye introduction outlining briefly the phenomenon to be studied. This is followed by the theoretical framework, the purpose of the study, significance of the study, areas of bias, delimitations, definition of terms, and a chapter summary.

Chapter Two presents the conceptual framework and theoretical perspectives. This contains six sections including differentiated instruction, humanism, constructivism, foreign language learning, assessment, and English education in Taiwan. Each section ends with a section summary.

Chapter Three describes the methodology for this study. In a discovery orientation, this case study employed multiple data collection techniques: field observation, individual interview, focus group discussion, videotaping, and artifact collection. Data analysis involved a three-step process: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Also included are detailed descriptions of the site (the institution and the department), the target population, the assessment, and the tasks offered in the final examination to enhance understanding of the study. Other components included in this chapter are ethical considerations, trustworthiness, and how the findings were reported.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the study. Text descriptions were developed, mostly coupled with tabular presentation, to provide a feel of direct participant responses in order of interview questions.

Chapter Five follows the lead of significant participant responses to explore further down into the core of the participants' experiences and generates inferences for a better understanding of the inquiry area. Seven reflective themes emerged from the data through constant comparison are: 1) choices as the roots of all possibilities, 2) self-determined score range as a manifestation of autonomy, 3) challenges as chances for breakthrough, 4) motivation and efforts as results of leveled tasks, 4) skills and confidence as natural flows from efforts, 5) skills and confidence as natural flows from efforts, 6) concerns as warning of potential pitfalls, and 7) suggestions as inspiration of future improvement. All the themes link together as a result of the offering of choices and finally lead to an overall acknowledgement and acceptance of tiered performance tasks. A figure illustrates the participants' perspectives on tiered performance tasks showing an overall acceptance.

Chapter Six wraps up the study arriving at conclusions and implications. Concluding discussion is regarding EFL learning and teaching, and implications derived were discussed under three headings: differentiated instruction in EFL context, teacher-learner relationship, and assessment. Finally, I discuss limitations of the study, offer suggestions for future research, and reach final conclusions of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In order to facilitate an understanding of the participants' perspectives on tiered performance tasks and the implications of the perspectives, this chapter aims at an examination of relevant literature on differentiated instruction as well as theories in relation to this study to better illustrate the approach of differentiated instruction. Areas of theories I spell out include humanism, constructivism, foreign language learning theories, assessment, and English education in Taiwan, EFL. All these areas of inquiry connect to each other in addressing the research questions.

Differentiated Instruction

The term “differentiated instruction” may be fairly new in education, the idea is not. However, because of the wide scope of practice involved, educators often get a vague idea of what it entails. In this section, I offer a clearer sense of the practice. Aspects concerning differentiated instruction presented here are its definition, a brief history, its characteristics, its implications in an EFL classroom, strategies often used, and suggestions of differentiation.

What Is Differentiated Instruction?

Differentiated instruction is sometimes referred to as differentiated learning (Tomlinson, 2000b). Educators discuss what differentiated instruction means to them from different perspectives. Nunley (2006) suggests a succinct definition of what it entails: “Differentiated instruction is simply providing instruction in a variety of ways to meet the needs of a variety of learners” (p. xvii). The most recognized advocate of differentiated instruction, Tomlinson (2000a)

defines the practice by what it takes and aims to do: “differentiation consists of the efforts of teachers to respond to variance among learners in the classroom. Whenever a teacher reaches to an individual or small group to vary his or her teaching in order to create the best learning experience possible, that teacher is differentiating instruction” (p. 1). Later, Tomlinson and Eidson (2003) refer the term as “a systematic approach to planning curriculum and instruction” (p.3) for heterogeneous student populations. They go a step further to stress that differentiated instruction is a way of thinking about the classroom with the dual goals of honoring each student’s learning needs and maximizing each student’s learning capacity. Gregory and Chapman (2002) also agree that differentiated instruction is “a philosophy that enables teachers to plan strategically in order to reach the needs of the diverse learners in classrooms today” (p. x). Therefore, on one hand, differentiated instruction is the teacher’s intention and attitude that values uniqueness of each student which can be translated into instructional endeavor of maximizing learner potential. On the other hand, it is the teacher’s action in a systematic way of instruction planned through understanding learner uniqueness and strategically adjusting instruction in accordance with individual needs to foster optimal learning in each student.

With the purpose of differentiating instruction in mind, I now turn to history of education for the roots of the practice. In an effort to sketch the development of differentiated instruction, Yatvin (2004) presents a short history of the practice, which helps forming a clear idea of what differentiated instruction is. She describes the origin dated back to the 18th century when European Romanticism celebrated the importance of individual. After a recent revisit to Confucian thoughts, I argue that differentiated instruction had been evident in ancient China through Confucius’ practice (Au, 1995; Chen, 1992; Dai, 2003; Huang, 1975; Hsu, 1996; Tsai,

1970; Wang, 1968). More detail on Confucius' educational philosophy is offered later in this chapter.

When tracing along the humanistic line that Elias and Merriam (2005) draw, differentiated instruction connects with educational philosophy of scholars as ancient as Confucius (511 B.C.-479 B.C.), Plato (428 B.C.-347 B.C.), and Aristotle (384 B.C.-322 B.C.). Humanistic values support the educational thought of thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau of the 18th century. Modern humanism in the 20th century takes many forms including pragmatism, of which Dewey was one of the founders.

A Brief History of Differentiated Instruction in the United States

In her book *A room with a differentiated view: How to serve ALL children as individual learners* on classroom practice with a differentiated view, Yatvin (2004) provides a clear and concise history of how differentiated instruction develops into an educational philosophy and instructional approach of increasing importance. In her account, Dewey shares some educational principles with Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau's fictional odyssey, *Emile*, maintained that education should follow the natural growth patterns of the children, nurture their native abilities, and allow them to pursue their interests. His then radical ideas blend with Dewey's progressivism, which emphasizes the centrality of the child in the educational process. Dewey believed that children learn best through active involvement in work that is meaningful and interesting to them. He also asserted that teaching should be more humane, focusing on the well-being of children rather than on the demands of curriculum (Dewey, 1963; Henson, 2003, Yatvin, 2004). However, Rousseau's and Dewey's ideas had little impact on public schools in the early 20th century.

Differentiated instruction in American educational history started about fifty years ago, when learning came to be viewed as thinking, creating, and problem solving (Yatvin, 2004). Before that a *one size fits all* approach had been prevailing for centuries. Although the traditional instruction is still common nowadays, more and more teachers are becoming concerned about learner-centered education that pairs a focus on individual learners with a focus on learning to promote the highest levels of motivation, learning, and achievement for all learners (McCombs & Whisler, 1997).

In the 1950s the only way to differentiate instruction was ability grouping, a practice of dividing students for instruction mostly on the basis of their perceived capacities for learning, not considering individual interests or learning profile. True differentiated instruction was not born until the 1960s, and it took off in several directions such as individualized instruction, open classroom, and individualized reading (Yatvin, 2004). In the 1970s a whole language approach became popular with the rise of constructivism, and some versions of whole language put differentiated instruction at the center of the classroom curriculum. In the 1980s several new theories and practices related to differentiated instruction appeared; these included multiple intelligences, cooperative learning, learning styles, and the integrated curriculum. In addition, changes in special education practice brought children with special needs into inclusive classrooms, while special programs for gifted children were developed to pull advanced students out of regular classroom for a certain period of time. As the 21st century unfolds, a group of educators, believing in standards and accountability, use different instruction for children who are not making progress in ordinary classroom programs. Another group pushing for differentiation believes in the uniqueness of every learner. They claim that instruction should match the particular learning needs, interests, talents, personality, and home background of each

student. While educational aims of these two groups are not mutually exclusive, they are different enough to provide distinct strands of differentiated instruction in the school curriculum.

Characteristics of Differentiated Instruction

Portraying differentiated instruction from another standpoint, Tomlinson (2001) suggests clearing away some misperceptions to understand the practice of differentiated instruction. She argues that differentiated instruction is “not the individualized instruction in the 1970s”, “not chaotic”, “not just another way to provide homogeneous grouping”, and “not just tailoring the same suit of clothes”. Instead, differentiated instruction is “proactive”, “more qualitative than quantitative”, “rooted in assessment”, applying “multiple approaches to content, process, and product”, “student centered”, “a blend of whole-class, group, and individual instruction”, and “organic” (pp. 2-5)

With all these characteristics, differentiated instruction stands as a broad term that refers to “a variety of classroom practices that accommodate differences in student’s learning styles, interests, prior knowledge, socialization needs, and comfort zone” (Benjamin, 2002, p. 1). Attending to individual differences, differentiated instruction can be applied to various educational levels, programs, settings, and subjects (MacGillivray & Rueda., 2003; Nunley, 2006; Pierce & Adams, 2004). Since student readiness, interest, and learning profile shape instruction, teachers supporting differentiated instruction employ an assortment of instructional arrangements, provide various materials, and offer multi-option assignments, while constantly seeking in students multiple perspectives on ideas and events (Hoover & Patton, 2005; Keck & Kinney, 2005; Nunley, 2006; Pierce & Adams, 2004; Tomlinson, 1999, 2001). In differentiating classrooms, higher motivation, critical thinking skills, durable learning, and fewer behavior

problems are expected through flexible application of strategies such as mixed ability grouping, cooperative learning, multiple learning modes, compacting, learning contracts, and tiered performance tasks (Benjamin, 2002; Braddock & Slavin, 1995; Gardner, 1993; Hoeck-Buehler, 2001; Pierce & Adams, 2004; Yatvin, 2004).

Differentiated Instruction in An EFL Classroom

A way of thinking about differentiating instruction is to consider what, how, why, and in what context the teacher is varying teaching. Generally speaking, proponents of differentiated instruction suggest teachers differentiate at least four classroom elements: content, process, product, and learning environment (e.g., Gregory & Chapman, 2002; Nunley, 2006; Tomlinson, 1999, 2001).

Content is what the student needs to learn or how the student will get access to the information. When differentiating content, the instructor thinks of what to teach and how to give student access to the learning goals, suggested Tomlinson (2001). As a general rule, students work on the same overall objective but differentiated in response to students' readiness levels, interests, backgrounds, and learning profiles (Gregory & Chapman, 2002; Nunley, 2006; Pettig, 2000; Tomlinson, 2001). Based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD), **readiness differentiation** of content matches the learning materials to a student's capacity to master while offering challenge at a suitable level (MacGillivray & Rueda, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). When challenges are well matched with abilities, learning is not only sustained but also provides enjoyment for the sake of learning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). **Interest differentiation** involves incorporating materials of student's interest range. When interested, the learner is motivated and the learning becomes meaningful (Bruner, 1960; Ernst & Ernst, 2005). Once EFL classroom activities connect to learner's

personal experience, the learners are more willing to engage in real-life communication in target language. Quality of learning is enhanced (Sato, 2003), and foreign language anxiety is reduced (Cortese, 1985). **Learning profile differentiation** ensures that the learner has a way of reaching the materials and ideas that match his/her preferred way of learning. Oxford (2004) asserts that style-relevant teaching is effective and efficient in helping student develop English skills. Reid (1987) supports the argument with a study reporting students taught with preferred learning style scored higher on an achievement test in ESL learning. All in all, attending to learner variables promotes motivation and accordingly enhances learning (Gass & Selinker, 2001). Importance of motivation in success of EFL learning is described “as a cyclical process: strong motivation, positive attitudes, and effective learning effort may result in increased language attainment and the feeling of progress, which may in turn enhance motivation and facilitate further effort” (Gan, Humphreys, & Hamp-Lyons, 2004, p. 231).

Process refers to activities in which the student engages in order to make sense of or master the content introduced (Tomlinson, 2000a). This is important because the student tries to analyze, apply, question, or solve a problem using the materials till the knowledge is internalized. Tomlinson suggests that a good differentiated activity is something that assists the student to understand an essential idea or to answer an essential question. It is something the student makes or does “in a range of modes at varied degrees of sophistication in varying time spans”, and “with varied amounts of teacher or peer support” (p. 80). Like content, activity or sense-making process can be differentiated to have room for student readiness, interest, and learning profile (Gregory & Chapman, 2002; Nunley, 2006). When these individual needs are addressed, foreign language learning anxiety level is lowered, engagement is improved, and the chances for durable learning are increased (Benjamin, 2002; Gardner, 1993). Nunan (1995) asserts that instructional

activities are chosen for various reasons; what counts is not the sources of the teaching activities, but “rather that activities selected or designed should reflect students’ level and interest to engage student involvement” (P. 138).

Products are performance tasks that ask the student to rehearse, apply, and extend what he or she has learned. According to Tomlinson (2001), well-designed performance tasks can be excellent motivational and assessing tools. Sometimes, a teacher can also use an assignment as a way to prompt students to explore modes of expression unfamiliar to them. So, it is important for the teacher to decide core expectations for quality level, and then use the assignment to stretch students in application of understanding and skill in their pursuit of quality, with some amount of scaffolding to allow students to reach success (Vygotsky, 1978). It is suggested that teachers make the assignment clear to students to avoid confusion and frustration (Tomlinson, 2001), and adaptations of the task may be made according to student readiness, interest, and learning profile. Differentiated product assignments are usually tiered or layered based on various levels of complexity (Nunley, 2006; Pettig, 2000, Pierce & Adams, 2004; Tomlinson, 1999, 2001). The products can be created using students’ preferred modes of expression.

Learning environment denotes the way the classroom works and its affective dimensions. Gregory and Chapman (2002) devote much discussion on creating a positive classroom culture for learning. First of all, the authors caution teachers that what they do, say, and allude to have an effect on students and their perception of success. This is because the human brain is a parallel processor, and it takes in information on a conscious and unconscious level. The brain can manage to process thoughts, emotions, and perceptions simultaneously (Gregory & Chapman, 2002). As teachers’ behaviors strongly relate to the development of a classroom climate, teachers “can make their classrooms more thoughtful places by demonstrating in their actions that they

welcome originality and differences of opinion” (p. 3). Thus, a differentiating learning environment promotes meaning-making. Secondly, both physical and emotional atmosphere should be attended to. Gregory and Chapman believe that an enriched environment consists of more than just physical attributes; plentiful resources such as materials, equipments, multicultural artifacts, quiet corners and social areas, even a variety of tasks and feedbacks will provide opportunities for collaborative interaction and intellectual growth. Other components for enriching classroom climate include music and laughter.

While an EFL classroom can be very anxiety-provoking, a risk-free supportive environment helps to minimize the impact of stress associated with foreign language learning (Ito & Chen, 2007). In an EFL context students may be vulnerable to test anxiety, the fear of negative evaluation and the communication apprehension, all present serious problems in learning (Horwitz et al, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Moslehpour & Chou, 2004).

Promoters of differentiated instruction indicate that by establishing bonds among learners and between learners and the teacher a differentiating classroom foster an all-encompassing climate that alleviates anxiety in EFL learners (Gregory & Chapman, 2002; Ito & Chen, 2007).

When differentiating a classroom, the teacher does not merely differentiate how the students learn; sometimes, it is necessary to differentiate what they learn and how a teacher assesses that learning took place. As learning and teaching are situated in context (Bruner, 1990), classroom climate plays an important role in how the teaching and learning proceed. The need of a positively differentiating environment can not be overstated (Gregory & Chapman, 2002; Tomlinson, 2000a).

Strategies Often Used in Differentiated Instruction

At this point of examining differentiated instruction as an instructional approach, a review of what this approach is targeting will help to identify effective strategies for achieving the goals. The dual foci in a humanistic view are the learner and learning (Henson, 2003), and these are the two focal points differentiated instruction is stressing. Differentiated instruction honors each student's learning needs and strives to maximize each student's learning capacity. To reach the goals, according to Tomlinson (1999), the instruction has to work on two essentials: engagement and understanding. By *engagement*, the teacher attracts students' attention so that more sustained learning can occur. By *understanding*, the student incorporates the important ideas into his or her inventory of how things work. Tomlinson goes on to explain that there are several dimensions in learning: facts, concepts, principles, attitudes, and skills. In whole learning, these dimensions are linked to make the gains robust. Facts are organized under concepts, or categories, which are in turn governed by principles, so holistic understanding is likely to happen. The learner also develops attitudes that spell the degrees of commitment and needed skills to translate the understanding into action. Tomlinson suggests concept-focused and skill-focused instruction to bring forth sustainable learning.

This sketch of learning dimensions is similar to Bloom's taxonomy of learning in the cognitive domain, as described in Gregory and Chapman's (2002) discussion of instructional techniques. Bloom's taxonomy comprises six levels including knowledge (recall of data), comprehension (grasp of meaning), application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (judging worth). The six levels build up in a hierarchical manner, which reflects constructivist view of knowledge construction.

The list of strategies for differentiating instruction can go on and on. Tomlinson (2000a, 2001) argues that whenever a teacher reaches out to an individual or small group to vary his or

her teaching in order to create the best learning experience possible, that teacher is differentiating instruction. Likewise, a strategy can be considered a differentiating strategy if targeting growth for all students by addressing learner differences and needs. A group of enthusiastic educators (e.g., Gregory & Chapman, 2002; Gregory & Kuzmich, 2004; Tomlinson, 1999, 2001) have suggested various strategies effective in differentiating instruction based on content/materials, communication methods, intelligence profiles, readiness, interest, and process. They encourage each differentiating practitioner to add his/her own favorite strategies to the well of options. The list should grow as teachers grow more skilled at creating responsive classrooms. A brief list of collectively recommended strategies includes:

- stations (different spots in the classroom where students work on various tasks simultaneously)
- agendas (personalized list of tasks)
- centers (distinct classroom areas that each contains a collection of activities or materials designed to teach, reinforce, or extend a particular skill or concept)
- tiered activities (activities that engage students with different learning needs to work with the same essential ideas and use the same key skills but at different levels of complexity and abstractness)
- learning contracts (a negotiated agreement between teacher and student)
- compacting (providing alternative activities for the student who has already mastered curriculum content,; in other words, compacting begins with assessing readiness and ends with an emphasis on student interest)
- independent study (a tailor-made opportunity to help students become independent learners developing talent and interest area)

- portfolios (collections of student work that emphasize student choice and provide ongoing assessment)

Principles of Differentiated Instruction

While the strategy inventory can be unlimited, there are a few essential components that are worth noting. Experts heavily underline the importance of ongoing assessment, flexible grouping, choice, and constant reflection in differentiating instruction.

Ongoing Assessment

Assessment is a critical component in differentiated instruction; it is the foundation of and the guide to successful differentiation in the content, process, and products. In Tomlinson's (2001) words, differentiated instruction is rooted in assessment. Because student readiness, interest, and learning profile shape instruction, meaningful pre-assessment that gathers information about each student's learning styles, modalities, intelligence profile, and thinking styles allows the teacher to make informed educational decisions for students. Fruitful assessment often comes from the question, "What are the possible ways students can demonstrate their understanding and skills?" As such, Tomlinson (2001) states that assessment becomes a part of teaching and a way to extend rather than merely measure learning. Assessment can take in forms of observation, interview, survey, performance task assessment, and should take place routinely throughout the whole term (Pettig, 2000). Research reports that readiness is constantly changing and English learners' learning styles may modify or extend with changes in academic environment and experience (Reid, 1987). As a result, extensive assessment is necessary and teaching plans and strategies need to be adjusted accordingly. However, getting to know the students' preferences and needs should not always be the teacher's responsibility.

Some direct ways to involve students in the needs assessment process is required in order to establish a successful language learning environment. Meanwhile, it is also important that each student increases knowledge about him/herself and develop metacognitive skills (Oxford, 2004).

With improved self-awareness and constantly accommodating instruction, learners will experience more success rather than frustration in foreign language learning.

Flexible Grouping

Applying a wide range of teaching strategies requires a flexible blend of whole-class, small group, and individual instruction. Gregory and Chapman (2002) advise teachers to use each element of T.A.P.S. (Total group, Alone, Partner, Small group), even multiage groups. In a similar vein, recognizing flexible group as a hallmark of differentiation, Tomlinson (2000a) suggests teachers plan extended periods of instruction so that all students get the opportunity to make meaning through interaction with a variety of peers over a period of days. Teachers can make informed grouping decisions if responding to pre-assessment data and considering factors such as information sources available, tasks, student interest, skill or ability level of students, learning styles and intelligence profiles, thinking skills, and process of product desired (Gregory & Kuzmich, 2004).

Effectiveness of group work in enhancing language learning experience is repeatedly confirmed by different researchers (Bailey, Onwuegbuzie, & Daley, 1999; Casado & Dereshiwsky, 2001; Sato, 2003). Among the various grouping strategies, cooperative learning is probably the most applied for its recognized success in promoting cognitive skills, social skills, and teamwork (Braddock & Slavin, 1995; Gregory & Chapman, 2002, Liao, 2007; Liao & Hsueh, 2005; Rich, 1993; Tomlinson, 2001). As Onwuegbuzie, Bailey and Daley (2000) state, “When students are taught specifically to be cooperative, their foreign language skills tend to improve,

as do their motivation levels, altruism, and attitudes toward their peers” (p. 6). Christison (2004) and George (2005) have reported that the best way for the student to learn is to teach what has been learned to someone else. Gregory and Kuzmich (2004) also note that teaching others results in the highest (90%) of retention, compared with other learning activities. Besides, in small group situations, students show less fear of negative evaluation and defensive attitude (Cortese, 1985).

Choice

Nunley (2006) argues that choice is the key to differentiate a classroom. Choice engages reluctant learners, because it engenders willingness. Providing choices may lead to better solutions than the ones a teacher would have imposed. With accountability added, a sense of belongingness is formed in the learner and brings forth active involvement in learning. As Krashen responds in the interview by Young (1992), the concept of club membership that Frank Smith discussed in his book *Understanding Reading*, results in a lower affective filter, reduces anxiety, and facilitates language learning. In the environment of differentiated instruction self-efficacy and autonomy are developed.

Constant Reflection

Reflection is the drive of professional development (Beattie, 2001). Supporters of differentiated instruction find constant reflection improves their practice (Benjamin, 2002; Tomlinson, 1999, 2000a). Reflection on the quality of what is being differentiated is also a challenge as it discloses not only matches, but mismatches between classroom practice and philosophy of teaching and learning (Tomlinson, 1999). Yet, continuous reflection helps the teacher to plan for the next step while working the way into a differentiated classroom.

Tomlinson raises some questions for differentiating teachers to ponder:

- Which students seemed to be engaged in learning? Which were not? Do you know why in either case?
- In what ways did the activity or lesson begin as you wished? Did it go off track? How? What worked and what didn't as students began to work?
- As the activity or lesson progressed, how well did students remain focused? If there was point where focus was ragged, can you figure out why?
- Were there any students who do not work well in groups, or do not work well alone?
- How did you interact with individuals and groups as they worked? What useful information did you gather as you moved among groups? How might you improve your data gathering and coaching?

Best Ways to Begin Differentiation

Due to increasing diversity in student population, differentiated instruction is gradually taking center stage as an educational practice in response to broadening learning needs (Pierce & Adams, 2004). However, in many classrooms, the teaching and learning approach is still more unitary than differentiated. Teachers do not engage in differentiated instruction for different reasons; some are not familiar with the practice, some are directed to adopt school's approved methods and materials, while some others are scared away by the seeming difficulties of differentiating instruction (Tomlinson, 2001; Yatvin, 2004). As a matter of fact, differentiating instruction **is** more difficult than standardizing it. Recognizing individual differences as well as preferences and treating each student as a capable and valuable member of the class is time consuming. Practicing differentiated instruction today is harder than it was and than it should be (Yatvin, 2004).

Speaking from years of successful experiences with differentiated instruction, Yatvin (2004) reveals that the secret is in how students make varied use of the learning opportunities available, not in multiple curriculum; Benjamin (2002), Nunley (2006) and Tomlinson (1999, 2001) echo in concert. Speaking from the teacher's perspective, same as Nunley, Tomlinson (1999) advises practitioners to "*start small*" (p. 96) and "*grow slowly—but grow*" (p. 97). It is helpful to remember that like students, teachers are as different as their learners, so it is necessary to balance their own needs with those of the students. Similarly, teachers grow best when moderately challenged just as the students. Suggestions for teachers new to differentiating instruction are, but not limited to, choosing to use individual strategies and begin by differentiating content, process, or product (Tomlinson, 2000a). For example, the teacher can group students by interest, but may also have activities set at different levels, which may result in varying products completed by students employing preferred learning modes. As teachers grow more proficient at creating responsive classrooms, the repertoire of effective practices expands from which more and more can be drawn on.

In addition, Benjamin (2002) points out that implementing different instruction involves an attitude change on teacher's part. What happens in the classroom will not change until the teacher does what needs to be done and starts teaching in an informed way: a way that is open to reflection and adjustment (Benjamin, 2002; Tomlinson, 1999, 2000a). Nevertheless, the teacher does not have to take on all the pressure alone. Veteran practitioners advise novice teachers to build a support system, which may include colleagues, administrators, parents, and community members. While differentiated instruction advocates "beginning where individuals are" (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 108), it marches toward a humanistic community where members seek personal growth for the purpose of societal betterment at large.

Section Summary

The above section discusses several aspects concerning differentiated instruction in an attempt to render a clearer understanding of this humanistic learner-centered approach. Some educators point out differentiated instruction requires much effort on the teacher's part; nevertheless, all the hard work may pay off when witnessing learners' growth in a favorable way. By following the advice from Tomlinson (2000a)--push yourself a little bit beyond your comfort zone--enthusiastic educators can start differentiation without too much stress. What educators need to remember is that the willingness of an open-minded teacher in taking challenges may lead to much successful learning for the students.

An open-minded teacher also offers student choices. As proponents of differentiated instruction indicate, choice is the key to differentiate a classroom. Choice allows students room for creativity, encourages learner accountability, and brings joy of self-directed learning. Likewise, choices of performance tasks in assessment reinforce motivation to achieve better and higher while reducing anxiety in a traditional test situation. This is the rationale of exploring EFL students' perception and views of tiered performance tasks in this study.

Humanism

Differentiated instruction connects with humanistic philosophy. Elias and Merriam (2005) contend that philosophy inspires people's activities and gives direction to practice. The following section firstly presents ideas of selected humanistic thinkers and educators to illustrate their contributions in general educational practices and relationship with differentiated instruction. Toward the end of the section Confucius' educational philosophy is presented, more to echo than to contrast with Western humanistic philosophy and the approach of differentiated

instruction. The revisit to Confucian teaching of differentiation discloses the inherent linkage among world cultures.

Rousseau

Jean-Jacques Rousseau is credited with the establishment of many important principles in modern pedagogy. Graves (1971) makes a comment that few men have had “as great an influence upon the organization, method, and content of education” (p. 106) as Rousseau. Through him education has become more closely related to human welfare. “The present-day emphasis upon the moral aim of education, the cultivation of social virtues, and the development of industrial education alike find some of their roots in the *Emile*” (p. 107), continues Graves.

In *Emile*, a classic treatise on education reform, Rousseau argues for a return to a more natural education. Jean-Jacques Rousseau believes “the humane and sensitive teacher would allow the learner to become self-sufficient, to develop all his/her potentialities, and to learn naturally” (Elias & Merriam, 2005, p. 114). He asserts the study of children is fundamental in education and shows that the material or activities provided must be consistent with the different stages of development. The modern regard for the freedom of the child and the study of a learner’s psychological development should be at least partially attributed to Rousseau. In addition to emphasis on the child, Rousseau suggests the tutor to plan lessons correlated to the child’s desires and natural development (Masters & Holifield, 1996). Thanks to him, accordingly, there is an increasing caution in forcing upon children a fixed way of thinking, feeling, and acting. Instead, compassion is appreciated as an essential element in democratic education (Graves, 1971; Masters & Holifield, 1996). Graves also associates Rousseau with the gradual disappearance of the old ideas that real educational values rest on the overcoming of distasteful

straining difficulties. Rousseau is quite modern in his advocacy of the learner as the starting point and of a warm and relaxing teacher-learner relationship (Elias & Merriam, 2005).

Examining the ideas the differentiated instruction subscribes to, we can see a clear link between the approach and Rousseau's assertion of learner-centeredness in education.

Dewey

Dewey is perhaps the most influential American educator of the 20th century. His philosophical approach to education provided a critique of traditional education and set a stage for the development of various educational approaches (Elias & Merriam, 2005). Dewey's humanistic vision is present in that he believes the aim of education is advancing welfare of the society (1975). Schools should strive for the development of children's moral sense, which directs knowledge to the accomplishment of social ends.

According to Dewey (1975), mere knowledge is simply held, not used. Knowledge applied through good judgment can help people to act intellectually to the situation, thus serve the interest of others. Such judgment is derived from the moral trinity—social intelligence, social power, and social interests. In other words, moral motives and forces in each child link learning with doing and serve as the social channels that attach knowledge to valuable ends of service to the society.

Dewey (1963) views the learner as the central part of the learning process. In his philosophy of experiential education, experience is a vital element, as he states “education must be conceived as a continuing reconstruction of experience” (1964, p. 177) and “education...is a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (1964, p. 172). Therefore, knowledge is gained through an experiential course of action, rather than passively receiving information from the teacher. Dewey believes school education should be grounded in the child's own social

activities to relate the child to real life through doing. The learner actively participates in “construction of the purposes involved in his studying” (Dewey, 1963, p. 67), while the teacher selects the influences which will affect the child and helps him to develop socially (1964). As such, the teacher is taking on the role of a facilitator, not simply providing information, but creating the condition within which learning will take place (Elias & Meriam, 2005).

In discussing relationship between individual and society, Dewey (1964) acknowledges the significance of individual factors, “I believe that the individual who is to be educated is a social individual and that society is an organic union of individuals. If we eliminate the social factor from the child we are left only with an abstraction; if we eliminate the individual factor from society, we are left only with an inert and lifeless mass. Education, therefore, must begin with a psychological insight into the child's capacities, interests, and habits... These powers, interests, and habits must be continually interpreted - we must know what they mean... in the way of social service” (p. 172).

Although Dewey put much emphasis on the ultimate goal of education as striving toward a better and more ideal society, the individual plays an important role in the process and the individual's powers, interests, and habits need to be honored in order to reach the final goal of education. Centrality and uniqueness of the learner can not be neglected. In this sense, it is fair to deem that Dewey values differentiated instruction.

Also manifest in his philosophy of experience Dewey recognizes the importance of individual perception, one of the principles of humanism (Elias & Merriam, 2005; Wyett, 1998). In *My pedagogic creed* he mentions how image facilitates sense-making in children: “The image is the great instrument of instruction. What a child gets out of any subject presented to him is simply the images which he himself forms with regard to it” (Dewey, 1964, p. 178). His

statement about the importance of image underlies the need of paying attention to learning experience and means of instruction. This sheds light on how pragmatists interpret ideas as instruments and plans of action rather than as images of reality; more specifically, they are suggestions and anticipations of possible conduct, hypotheses or forecasts of what will result from a given action, or ways of organizing behavior. By promoting teaching that attends to learning experience, Dewey's belief resonates with differentiated instruction.

Maslow

In celebration of student-centeredness and responsibility for learning in terms of self-development, Maslow is a key supporter for self-actualization (Elias & Merriam, 2005). In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, self-actualization is a growth need of finding self-fulfillment and realizing one's potential (Maslow, 1970). According to Maslow, the goal of education is self-actualization, or becoming the best that a person is able to become. Maslow suggests educators to think in terms of encouraging intrinsic rather than extrinsic learning—learning to be a human being in the first place and secondly learning to be this particular human being (Elias & Merriam, 2005). Maslow's study of extraordinary adults such as Lincoln and Beethoven suggested the personality characteristics of self-actualized persons such as efficient perception of reality, acceptance of self, others, and nature, problem centering, autonomy, creativeness, and identity with humanity (Maslow, 1970).

Rogers

Similar to Maslow, Rogers sees education as a means of fostering personal growth and development (Elias & Merriam, 2005). Rogers asserts the emphasis upon the student in the learning process is essential. This thread of argument is present in his work, *Freedom to Learn* (1983). For him, a student-centered approach follows the guiding principles of honoring

individual learning style, needs, and interests of students in the entire educational process.

Further, Rogers supports the need for learners to take control over their learning. The role of the teacher is that of facilitator and partner in the course of learning. In addition, self-evaluation, intrinsic motivation, self-concept, and discovery are all critical components in the process of learning to be fully functioning individuals. As for curriculum, it becomes a vehicle, not an end for it is included under the goal of assisting learners to grow and develop in accordance with their needs and interests (Elias & Merriam, 2005).

Interpreting the nature of the learning process, George (2005) recognizes the fundamental relationship between Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Rogers' emphasis of intrinsic motivation, and differentiated instruction. George argues that "because human needs, interests, and motivation are so dizzyingly idiosyncratic, even in school settings—significant learning (that which is personally meaningful, satisfying, transferable, and long lasting) must be, absolutely must be, mediated by the differentiation of instruction" (p. 191).

Knowles

Influenced by Rogers, Knowles developed a theoretical framework of andragogy, which he originally proposes as a rubric for adult education and later recognizes that it means more than helping adults learn. He explains that it means helping human beings learn, and therefore has implications for the education of children and youth (Elias & Merriam, 2005; Knowles, 1970, 1998). Andragogy is based on five humanistic values including learner-centeredness, potency of individual, individual's potential of self-actualization, autonomy, and self-direction. Knowles' philosophy of education is characterized by a faith that self-directed learners are intrinsically motivated. These "high learners" are similar to Rogers' fully functioning individuals or Maslow's self-actualizing adults (Elias & Merriam, 2005).

Humanistic educators promote self-actualization, but self-development does not occur in an isolated situation. Growth is best fostered in a supportive environment (George, 2005; Gregory & Chapman, 2002). Humanistic educators attend to the affective, emotional, as well as intellectual dimensions of the learner. This attempt is most likely to be achieved through warm interpersonal relationship in a cooperative, often group learning context. In line with the humanistic orientation, differentiating educators employ flexible grouping as a regular practice.

Confucius

As Elias and Merriam (2005) indicate, humanism as a philosophy can be traced back to Confucius [孔子]. Confucius was an eminent teacher and a learned scholar born in 551 B.C. No one in China has enjoyed such respect and exerts such influence as Confucius. To the Chinese, he is “the Most Saintly Teacher” or the Great Sage. Chinese people firmly believe in Confucian doctrines with almost religious zeal, although Confucius is absolutely not a god. Wang (1968) describes Confucianism as a cultural influence that is “probably the steering wheel of [Chinese] mental and institutional development” (p. 16). In the regional context, by the mid-nineteenth century, “East Asian polity, society, and culture had been so much seasoned in the Confucian persuasion that political governance, social ethics, and even the habits of the heart in China, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan were characteristically Confucian in word and deed” (Tu, 2000, p. 196).

Confucius is considered China’s first teacher devoted to general education. Before him, there was certainly education, but it was provided in a tutoring fashion. According to Ni (2002), “Confucius was probably the first to offer systematic education in an institutional way, the first to make teaching a career and an art, and the first to recognize the transforming power of education” (p. 6). Confucius defines the aim of education with a humanistic vision; education

is more than just the acquisition of knowledge, but more fundamentally a transformation of the person and preparation for public service (Hsu, 1996; Ni, 2002). The primary purpose of Confucian education is character building. Intent on the cultivation of the full person, education emphasizes ethical as well as cognitive intelligence (Au, 1995; Tu, 2000).

Confucius is respected as a magnificent teacher mainly for his lofty moral character and superb competence. He sets an ideal example for his followers by demonstrating in his own action fervent love for learning, fanatical enthusiasm for teaching, genuine love for his students, and high expectations from his disciples (Au, 1995). He has such a keen passion for intellectual development that he continuously engages himself in scholarly inquiry. He imparts knowledge without reservation and never rejects anyone who comes for instruction, regardless of the readiness and ability level. As he once spoke of himself, he learns without satiety and teaches others without weariness (Confucius, trans. 1938; Huang, 1975, Murray, 1958) [學而不厭，誨人不倦] (Zhu, 1994., 論語述而第七 7.2). Confucius sincerely cares about his disciples, yet his expectations are high and strict at the same time. Consequently, his followers love him, respect him, admire him, and marvel at his superior personality. To Tzu Gong [子貢], one of his esteemed students, Confucius is the sun and moon that cannot be climbed over and cannot be defamed (Confucius, trans. 1938; Confucius, trans. 1986) [仲尼，日月也，無得而踰焉。人雖欲自絕，其何傷於日月乎？] (Zhu, 1994, 論語子張第十九 19.24); he is so sublime that everybody looks up to and nothing can hurt his brilliance (Au, 1995, Murray, 1958). As a competent teacher, Confucius is not only knowledgeable, but strategic in his teaching. He employs various strategies to inspire his students. Through observations and conversations, he gets to know his students well. Findings of these informal assessments enable him to deliver well thought-out instruction in line with the learner's ability, temperament, mental state,

interests, needs, and life goals (Au, 1995; Chen, 1992; Y.-G. Chen, 2006; Guo, 1995; Hsu, 1996; Tsai, 1970). Confucius also differentiates his judicious teaching according to circumstances; judging the situation and nature of pursuit he guides the learner through probing questions (something similar to Socratic inquiry), comparison, cuing, prompting or contemplating. No matter how he assists, the student reaches understanding. The key is that the learner actively constructs knowledge to grasp the meaning, and the goal is to bring forth the student's potential to the fullest. In such process, Confucius is undoubtedly the facilitator, the guide, and the helper, while the student is the main actor, and sometimes peers scaffold when appropriate (Hsu, 1996; Huang, 1975).

Confucius said that “he who learns but does not think, is lost. He who thinks but does not learn is in great danger.” (Confucius, trans. 1938, p. 91) [學而不思則罔，思而不學則殆] (Zhu, 1994, 論語爲政第二 2.15), which implies that comprehension is gained through dynamic reflection; therefore, rote memorization will not lead to the truth (Hsu, 1996; Huang, 1975; Tsai, 1970). In his ideas, the preferred learning and teaching context is that the student initiates the inquiry, thinks through the problem, reflects on the experience, and makes inferences to achieve true understanding (Chen, 1992; Guo, 1995; Hsu, 1996; Huang, 1975). Practicing in ancient China more than two thousand and five hundred years ago, Confucius had been implementing humanistic differentiated instruction which is being promoted in the modern United States. This is an excellent example of “civilizational dialogues” (p. 218) through “mutual referencing” (p. 218) that Tu (2000) suggests.

Confucius and Dewey

Confucius and Dewey have much in common in terms of their humanistic philosophy of education. In an attempt to describe Dewey's “qualifications” to be called a “Second Confucius,”

Grange (2004) outlines parallels between the two humanistic giants: experience relates to *dao* [道] (the Golden Rule or the right way to handle a situation), inquiry connects with the concept of *li* [禮] (ritual propriety), and community life is represented by the Confucian idea of *ren* [仁] (human heartedness) (Ni, 2002).

Both Confucius and Dewey view the individual as central to an education that aims to foster moral sense and eventually leads to a better world. They consider that the goal of personal development is to advance social interests, thus the only way to create an ideal society (the embodiment of *ren* in **community life**) is to consolidate individual goals with social ends, which is fundamentally a process of **inquiry** (learning *li*) to find *dao*, the Confucian equivalent of Dewey's primary concern of **experience**. Due to remote differences in time and personal backgrounds, Confucius' practice stresses liberal arts while Dewey emphasizes commitment to technology as the way to make good on the findings of science (Hsu, 1996, Grange, 2004).

Working out connections between Confucius and Dewey signifies the beginning of deeper cultural understanding in an increasingly interconnected world. Expounding the implications of Confucianism in the modern world, Tu (2000) suggests that in addition to providing for the acquisition of knowledge and skills, schooling must be congenial to the development of cultural competence and appreciation of spiritual values.

Section Summary

This section on humanism lends itself to the illustration of how educational philosophy of thinkers relate to one another, not only within the Western tradition, but also from the East to the West and from the ancient to the present. A revisit to the humanistic philosophy finds support for differentiating instruction for optimal learning. Humanism enhances recognition of the individuality, potentiality, creativity, and freedom of the learner in this study. My belief is that,

with uniqueness acknowledged and flexibility allowed for individual performance, students will not only enjoy learning more but also achieve better in assessment. The bond connecting differentiated instruction and Confucian teaching philosophy, as indicated in humanistic philosophy, sets a stage for potential application of differentiated instruction in an EFL context for Chinese college students in Taiwan.

Constructivism

Constructivism joins to shape the theoretical framework of differentiated instruction. It believes learning is a result of constructing personal meaning based on the individual's prior knowledge and beliefs. This principle implies that each learning experience is uniquely meaningful to the learner. It also gives rise to the change in the focus of teaching—putting the learner and the learner's efforts to understand at the center of the learning process (Scheurman, 1997). Constructivism includes many varieties among which, sociocultural theory is especially relevant to differentiated instruction because most often than not, differentiated instruction is situated in a dynamic interactive context.

This section presents theories of selected constructivists in relation to differentiated instruction. I start with the ideas from Piaget, and then proceeds with theories of Vygotsky, Bruner, and Gardner.

Section Overview

Constructivism is a philosophy of learning founded on the premise that, by reflecting our experiences, we construct our own understanding of the world we live in. In search of understanding constructivist classrooms, Brooks and Brooks (1993) elaborate on learning within the constructivist perspective. Each of us generates our own rules and mental models, which we use to make sense of our experiences. Learning, on this basis, is the process of adjusting our

mental models to accommodate new experiences. To search for meaning, learning starts with the issues around which students are actively trying to make sense out of. Meaning requires understanding “whole” as well as parts, while parts must be understood in the context of wholes. Therefore, the learning process focuses on primary concepts, not isolated facts. In order to foster effective learning, educators must understand the mental models that students use to perceive the world and the assumptions they make to support the models. The purpose of learning, then, is for an individual to construct his or her own meaning, not just memorize the right answers and spit out someone else’s meaning. The constructivist view of learning, suggests Scheurman (1997), implies that knowledge (actually, reality itself) is largely in the eyes of the beholder and therefore is situated in a particular context.

Piaget

The famous Swiss psychologist, Piaget, is credited with starting the constructivism movement (von Glasersfeld, 1997). Piaget is renowned for constructing a highly influential model of child development and learning. He believes that the developing child builds cognitive structures for understanding and responding to physical experiences by keeping equilibrium through assimilation or accommodation, within his or her environment (Piaget, 1973). His schemata theory attests that a child's cognitive structure increases in sophistication with development, moving from a few innate reflexes to highly complex mental activities while intellectually adapting to and organizing the environment (Wadsworth, 1989). In other words, cognitive development occurs when the child interacts with his or her environment. The growth of knowledge is a progressive construction of structures, which logically supersedes one another, by adding the new ones to the schema file (Phillips, 1975; Wadsworth, 1989).

Piaget's developmental theory inspires teachers to plan developmentally appropriate curriculum that enhances students' cognitive growth and to emphasize the critical role that experiences play in learning. However, his theory emphasizes general cognitive functions as a principle governing growth in the natural world while neglecting possible individual differences derived from contextual variables in personal profile (Dai, 2003). Gardner expands the constructivist view with more emphasis on individual uniqueness, which is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Vygotsky

The work of Vygotsky provides a sound theoretical foundation for investigating the rationale underlying various instructional strategies. Vygotsky's ideas have been applied to curriculum development, language development, teacher education, inclusion, creativity, and play (Doolittle, 1997). His sociocultural learning theory claims that socialization is the foundation of cognitive development (1978). He believes that knowledge is co-constructed by and distributed among individuals as they interact with one another and with cultural artifacts such as pictures, discourse, and gestures (Scheurman, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978).

The social cognition learning model claims that culture is the prime determinant of individual development. Every child develops in the context of a culture (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, a child's learning development is affected by the culture in which he or she involves. Culture makes two kinds of contributions to a child's intellectual development. First, through culture children acquire much of the content of their thinking, that is, their knowledge. Second, the surrounding culture provides children with the processes or means of their thinking. In short, culture teaches children both what to think and how to think. Because cognitive development

results from a “dialect process” (p. 46), language, one of the primary forms that exists in culture, is the child’s major tool of intellectual adaptation as learning progresses.

Language, according to Vygotsky (1978), is a highly personal and a profoundly social human process. Speech not only facilitates the child’s problem-solving but also controls the child’s own behavior (Doolittle, 1997). This was observed in an experiment with some four- and five-year-old children. The children turned their communicative speech inward when unable to engage in social speech, which process demonstrated that language can take on “an *intrapersonal* function in addition to *interpersonal* use” (p. 27). Thus, Vygotsky concludes that “[e]very function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, *between* people (*interpsychological*), and then *inside* the child (*intrapsychological*)” (p. 57). In addition, the transformation of an interpersonal process into an intrapersonal one is a long, dynamic process in which the learner actively constructs understanding as the result of social experiences. The internalization of socially rooted and historically developed activities is the distinguishing feature of human beings.

The central tenet of Vygotsky’s theory is the construct of zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is tightly related to his view of socialization in the process of internalization (Doolittle, 1997). The dynamics of internalization exemplifies how a child’s cognitive development occurs in the “dialectical process” of learning. A child learns through social interactions with other students and adults into culture. Initially, the person interacting with the child assumes most of the responsibility for guiding the problem solving, but gradually this responsibility transfers to the child, causing internal speech and reflective thought to arise and enable the child to operate up to his or her potential developmental level. This way the child, developing from lower mental functions to higher ones, has the opportunity to reach beyond his

or her actual development level as the interactions add to a child's intellectual growth. Vygotsky calls this immediate potential range ZPD (p. 86), that is, the difference between what the child can do on his or her own and what the child can do with help. Like scaffolding used in construction, the interactions help the child grow inward to enact higher psychological functions. Scaffolding channels the learner to independent and self-regulated competence of skills when the child's inner speech occurs.

Doolittle (1997) points out three aspects of ZPD that influence functional pedagogy: the use of whole and authentic activities, the need for social interaction, and the process of individual change. Vygotsky believes that effective learning requires whole and authentic activities, or those that involve applying learned knowledge and skills to complete real-world tasks within a meaningful cultural context. He further states that the need for learning these authentic activities must be "relevant to life" (1978, p. 118) and the learner must feel a need for the development to occur, so to become engaged in the purposeful and meaningful application of knowledge or skills.

The ZPD is inherently social in nature; educators should make efforts to create the learning environment socially interactive to carry out collaborative activities. Doolittle (1997) clarifies that the essence of the ZPD is the interdependent social system in which cultural meanings are actively constructed by both the student and the teacher. Interdependence is an important element in Vygotskian educational process.

The goal of cognitive development is change in the learner, claims Vygotsky. Accordingly, he believes that instruction should strive to stimulate cognitive growth and development (Doolittle, 1997). Besides, he believes that the ZPD is always undergoing change.

As the child interacts with another individual, he or she learns, and development of culturally relevant behavior occurs.

The construct of ZPD informs educational practices in many ways. Vygotsky (1978) states that “human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them” (p. 88). When planning instruction, educators should keep in mind that with appropriate adult help children can often perform tasks that they are incapable of completing on their own, therefore scaffolding can be an effective form of teaching if the teacher continually adjusts the level of help in response to the child’s level of performance. However, individualized scaffolding can be a challenge for the teacher, too, because it would be extremely time-consuming. Appropriate and timely use of homogeneous grouping might be an alternative solution in a classroom with large number of students.

When speaking of teacher involvement, Piaget and Vygotsky hold contrasting views. On one hand a Piagetian view suggests that direct teacher involvement may inhibit learning while on the other hand, Vygotsky’s approach of scaffolding and guided discovery suggests that a guiding hand by the teacher is critical for effective learning (Piaget, 1973; Vygotsky, 1978). It seems that how much teacher involvement is appropriate rests on individual learner needs and the interaction between the teacher and the learner.

Vygotsky also calls for adjustment to evaluation of mental development. In the past, testing systems often consider only what level the child reaches without assistance of others. This procedure steers learning toward developmental stages already completed. Yet, assessment methods must take into account the zone of proximal development. When targeting both the level of actual development and the level of potential development, assessment allows the child to perform up to the fullest ability, which can be amazing.

For Vygotsky, formal education serves as a catalyst for the transmission of cultural ideals, values, and behaviors (Doolittle, 1997). This is not only true in general education setting, but especially relevant to EFL classrooms as language is intricately intertwined with culture. Language teaching and learning can not be complete without cultural considerations as social and cultural backgrounds define language ability (Anstey & Bull, 2006). In addition, the social nature of the ZPD and the constructivist view of sociocultural learning theory provide strong support for the practice of differentiated instruction in a college EFL context.

Bruner

Bruner leads revolutionary changes in the development of constructivism in the later half of 20th century. Influenced first by the ideas of Piaget and then Vygotsky, he holds constructive view of cognitive development and to a greater degree, he believes the child's social environment and particularly social interaction with other people are crucial in the learning process (Bruner, 1960, 1990; Dai, 2003). In *Acts of Meaning* (1990) he proposes "the restoration of meaning-making as the central process of a cultural psychology, of a refreshed Cognitive Revolution" (p. 63-64) by introducing "felicity conditions" (p. 63) in which meaning in situated speech becomes cultural and conventional. Thus, language is not only an instrument of communication but also a vehicle for reflecting aloud that provides a place for the utterer's intent. Paying attention to communicative context, he argues that narrative is "one of the most ubiquitous and powerful discourse forms in human communication" (p. 77). In his words, "[n]arrative structure is even inherent in the praxis of social interaction before it achieves linguistic expression....it is a 'push' to construct narrative that determines the order of priority in which grammatical forms are mastered by the young child" (p. 77). His emphasis on social interaction and cultural influences on learning is then clearly revealed.

As a departure from rigid Piagetian developmental theory, Bruner takes on a flexible stance about learning and proposes that “any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development” (1960, p. 33). Addressing educators, he advises, “you do not wait for readiness to happen; you foster or ‘scaffold’ it by deepening the child’s powers at the stage where you find him or her now” (p. 120). This notion underpins the idea of the *spiral curriculum*, “[a] curriculum as it develops should revisit...basic ideas repeatedly, building upon them until the student has grasped the full formal apparatus that goes with them” (1960, p. 13). Obviously, Bruner regards learning as an active process of constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing based on the learner’s prior knowledge as he comments that “[t]he teaching and learning of structure, rather than simply the mastery of facts and techniques, is at the center of the classic problem of transfer.... If earlier learning is to render later learning easier, it must do so by providing a general picture in terms of which the relations between things encountered earlier and later are made as clear as possible” (1960, p. 12).

It is a teacher’s responsibility, then, to provide the supportive environment for meaningful learning to occur. As a teacher, one has to be clear about what to expect from students and how to reach the aims; particularly important is the rationale behind these educational decisions. Bruner maintains that pedagogy should reflect the teacher’s educational philosophy, “[a] choice of pedagogy inevitably communicates a conception of the learning process and the learner. Pedagogy is never innocent. It is a medium that carries its own meaning” (1966, p. 63).

Inevitably, a motivating curriculum is not formulated solely based on the teacher’s beliefs and perceptions. More critically, the curriculum needs to be grounded on full understanding of the learners. Therefore, Bruner (1996) suggests the new agenda is to determine

what the students think they are doing and what their reasons are for doing it. This understanding enables the teacher to make informed decisions and alerts the teacher to individual student needs. Bruner notes that curriculum needs to address the needs of all learners and abilities, yet, unfortunately current practice fails to take into account varying ability levels while attempting to meet standards. Bruner (1996) has pointed out one of the vital tasks for contemporary education in that teachers must strive for teaching individuals, and assess them accordingly.

Bruner notices, “[o]ur system of assessment tends to emphasize the acquisition of factual knowledge, primarily because that is what is most easily evaluated; moreover, it tends to emphasize the correct answer, since it is the correct answer on the straightforward examination that can be graded as correct” (1966, p. 66). He goes on to point out that such examination can be bad in the sense of emphasizing trivial aspects of a subject; it encourages teaching in a disconnected fashion and learning by rote. It is then inferred that what he tries to promote is the whole and authentic assessment that a student-centered education subscribes to.

Gardner

Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences (MI) has exerted profound influences on the educational field. It goes beyond challenging traditional concepts of student talents and abilities to entail a broad vision of education. It involves educators opting for depth over breadth by developing enriched instruction to accommodate various individual learning styles. Since its first introduction in Gardner’s book *Frames of Mind* in 1983, the groundbreaking theory touched off a wave of educational innovation not only in the United States but throughout the world (e.g., Lin, 2003). The MI theory has been positively embraced by educators and widely applied at various levels and contexts (Brualdi, 1996; Hsu, 1996; Lin, 2003; Nolen, 2003; Rubado, 2002).

Due to dissatisfaction with the conventional concept of IQ and unitary views of

intelligence, Gardner (1993) proposed the theory of multiple intelligences supported by his research findings from years of study on human abilities in the brain. His initial list formulated seven intelligences: linguistic/verbal intelligence, musical intelligence, mathematical-logical intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and intrapersonal intelligence. An eighth one, naturalist/environmental intelligence was added later with other possibilities suggested (Gardner, 1999).

In *Multiple intelligences: The theory in practice* Gardner (1993) redefined intelligence and described the construct of intelligence, “human cognitive competence is better described in terms of a set of abilities, talents, or mental skills, which we call ‘intelligences.’ All normal individuals possess each of these skills to some extent; individuals differ in the degree of skill and in the nature of their combination” (p. 15). He believes that each of these relatively autonomous human intellectual capacities have equal claim to priority. Gardner further claims that the intelligences rarely operate independently; they are used at the same time and tend to complement each other as people develop skills or solve problems. Yet, these intelligences are “to a significant extent *independent*... This independence of intelligences implies that a particularly high level of ability in one intelligence, say mathematics, does not require a similarly high level in another intelligence, like language or music” (p. 26). Therefore, to assist students learn better, educators must understand the forms of learning and how their cognition may differ from one another. Careful and accurate understanding of the profile of intelligences of the individual learner would allow educators to tailor instruction to learner’s needs.

Assessment, then, plays an important role in MI approach. Assessment provides insight into both students’ strengths and weaknesses. Knowing learners’ talents indicates areas to further develop while assessment of deficiencies can predict difficulties the learner will have and

suggests alternative routes to an educational goal, for example, learning mathematics via spatial relations or learning music through linguistic techniques. As Gardner points out, seven kinds of intelligence would allow seven ways to teach (Gardner, 1993). “Assessment, then, becomes a central feature of an educational system. We believe that it is essential to depart from standardized testing” (p. 31).

Then, how do we assess intelligences? According to Gardner (1993), “an important aspect of assessing intelligences must include the individual's ability to solve problems or create products using the materials of the intellectual medium. Equally important, however, is the determination of which intelligence is favored when an individual has a choice” (p. 31). This sort of tests is different from traditional measures with regard to materials, equipment, and type of results. It looks to employ various forms of means, rather than just pencil-and-paper, to collect information and render, not just scores, but descriptive as well as interpretive results. Besides, the results are to be part of an individual profile of intellectual inclination so an accurate overview of the student’s strengths and weaknesses is depicted.

Seeing that each of the intelligences is potential in every learner, Nolen (2003) points out that it is part of a teacher’s job to nurture and help the children develop their own intelligences. Teachers should structure the presentation of material in a style which engages all or most of the intelligences. When teachers center lessons on the students’ needs, it optimizes learning for the whole class. Reiff (1997) advances the argument by indicating the relationship among education, culture, and intelligence and goes on to advocate individualized and culturally responsive learning experiences in MI classrooms.

If looked from another viewpoint, MI is not about new ways to perform tasks but rather a fresh entry point to thinking about different types of experiences to engage students in the

classroom. In this respect the educational implications of Gardner's work stands in a direct line from the work of John Dewey. Dewey believes learners must experience life, and certain capacities of an individual are not observed except when they are associating with others. This interrelatedness between experiences and learning is similar to how the different intelligences correlate to work together, while remaining independent, to aid in learning. Actually, according to Armstrong (1994), MI as a philosophy has its historical background; starting as early as Plato, passing down to Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, and Dewey, all share the pluralistic view of education and endorse multimodal teaching. Armstrong further extends the theoretical links to scholars in the 20th century such as Piaget who provides a comprehensive map for logical-mathematical intelligence and to Vygotsky who supplies developmental models of linguistic intelligence.

The distinct multiplicity of intellectual faculties has been applied in various contexts to enhance teaching and learning (e.g., Christison, 1998). In EFL classrooms, cooperative learning places emphasis on interpersonal intelligence while developing language skills. Whole language instruction focuses on the cultivation of linguistic intelligence by using music, hands-on activities, introspection, and group work. Suggestopedia uses drama, visual aids, and music as an integrated part of the instruction (Armstrong, 1994). In addition, total physical response (TPR) is deemed especially effective in boosting children's language understanding by involving body movements (Dai, 2003; Lin, 2003). As a whole, MI-based instruction can be considered a constructivist approach. Students are encouraged to construct their own ideas through problem solving using their intelligences. They build and strengthen what they already know and feel confident in. MI practice increases student control and initiative thus reducing teacher directedness. Uniqueness of individual intelligence profiles connotes paying attention to each

learner's educational needs, learning styles, and personal traits, all of which are aspects addressed in differentiated instruction.

Armstrong (1994) notes that MI's greatest contribution to education is that it enlightens teachers to expand their repertoire of techniques, tools, and strategies, beyond the typical linguistic and logical ones predominantly used in traditional classrooms. MI theory aids in understanding and teaching the many aspects of human intelligence and learning profiles. Christison (1998) expresses a humanistic concern and suggests if we can mobilize the full spectrum of human abilities and ally them to an ethical sense, we can help to increase the likelihood of our survival, and perhaps prosperity, on this planet.

Section Summary

Constructivism values developmentally and appropriately supported learning that is initiated and directed by the student. The learner is placed in the center of the learning process. Since each learner is different, the outcome of learning is unique to each individual. This focus on the learner and learning process is the heart of humanism and constructivism as well. Piaget initiates the constructive view of child development, Vygotsky emphasizes socially-taught and culturally-determined nature of speaking and thinking skills, Bruner stresses the role of culture in shaping our thoughts and language, and Gardner's powerful concept of individual competence changes the face of education today—all elucidate the uniqueness of individual and the interrelationship between the society and its members. These socio-constructivist views of learning again shed light on the need for differentiated instruction.

Whereas differentiated instruction celebrates individuality, the relationship between the individual and those around and the environment is not to be neglected. In use of language, the mutually acting relationship is particularly crucial; communicative competence can not develop

and is not even needed without interactive communication. In differentiated instruction, opportunities of interaction and scaffolding among learners are constantly created to facilitate the development of communicative competence. In a sense, the students pursue personal growth while assisting learning for one another, just like separate intelligence operates independently and interdependently at the same time. The promotion of individual development in social contexts offers another reason that differentiated instruction is a potential fit in supporting EFL learning and teaching.

Foreign Language Learning

The goal of this section is to take a view of the following areas related to EFL: the development of EFL methodology, the Communicative Approaches as pedagogy, a shift toward cultural responsiveness, and English education in Taiwan. First, I provide a brief history of EFL methodology, and then an investigation of the Communicative Approaches covering the Natural Approach and Communicative Language Teaching, which leads to a discussion of pedagogical shift toward cultural responsiveness. Finally, English education in Taiwan is described and connects to assessment issues in EFL classrooms.

Section Overview

Language is the most common and the most important communication tool. Learning one's native language is often taken for granted, while the need of learning a foreign language appears more and more essential when international contact becomes increasingly frequent. Richards and Rodgers (1986) document some sixty percent of world population was multilingual in the 1980s. Tracing back in history five hundred years ago, Latin was the dominant language of education in European-dominated areas (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Due to the fast expansion of global village and technology advancement, the number of English speaking and learning

population is ever increasing. In fact, there is an English fever going on; English has become the most widely studied, read, and spoken foreign language on this planet (Liu, 2005). The number of Chinese students of English was estimated to be as high as 250 million by the year 2000, representing the world's largest source of English learners (Nunan, 2005; Yang, 2000).

Undoubtedly, English has become the dominant international language in many fields such as education, commerce, communication, science, technology, and entertainment in the 21st century (Hopey, 1999; Liu, 2005; Warschauer, 2000).

While English is becoming a major medium of world communication in various aspects, the fast advance of technology and telecommunication has resulted in further spread of English as a world language. At the same time, the English language is undergoing changes in its form and function (Markee, 2000; Warschauer, 2000) due to broadening use of electronic-based communication. As Warschauer (2000) indicates, the rapid transformation of English not only challenges our notions of language, literacy, culture, and economics, but it is bringing about actual changes in the ways people communicate, work, and live. It certainly has profound implications for the field of EFL.

The intricate relationship between language and culture can not be over-emphasized. Language is a coding system with a primary function of conveying meaning for human communication among members of that language community (Hung, 1992). As such, learning a foreign language is to learn what the native speakers know about that language and how they think (Cook, 2004). From a linguistic view, Gass and Selinker (2001) listed a number of linguistic aspects of language that an EFL learner needs to know: phonology, syntax, morphology, semantics, and pragmatics. In search for a learner-centered EFL model from a sociocultural perspective, the target language itself as a whole in relation to the society as well as

the culture and how prevailing views of language influence current pedagogical decision are of primary concerns of this study. Consequently, literature review regarding general EFL practice in this section places emphasis on English as a world language, its impact on local cultures and EFL pedagogy development. The English education in Taiwan is then discussed to situate the research question. First of all, a look at the development of EFL methodology provides a sense of history.

A Brief History of EFL Methodology

In order to boost a sense of history about the profession of foreign language teaching, Celce-Murcia (2001) briefly sketches out the historical bases of the methodology. The field of foreign language teaching has undergone several rises and falls and shifts over the years since classical Greek and Medieval Latin period. Prior to the twentieth century, language teaching methodology fluctuated between two types of approaches: language use versus language analysis. Language use approach tries to get learners to use a language, thus the abilities to speak and to understand are emphasized. Language analysis approach tries to get learners to analyze a language through learning grammatical rules. Therefore, reading and writing skills are stressed.

Before the Renaissance, classical Greek and Latin were used as lingua franca, while classical Latin became the formal object in schools and gradually came to its demise as a lingua franca in the fourteenth century. During the seventeenth century the focus in language study shifted back to utility rather than analysis. At that time Johann Amos Comenius, a Czech scholar, was famous for his inductive teaching approach. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the analytical Grammar-Translation Approach became well-established in schools and universities again. The work of Karl Ploetz, a German scholar, had a tremendous influence on the foreign language teaching profession throughout his lifetime and afterwards.

However, by the end of Nineteenth century the Direct Method, which stressed the ability to use a language, began to hold sway. François Gouin advocated exclusive use of the target language in the classroom, believing that a language cannot be taught, but learned in appropriate conditions. In 1886, during the same period that the Direct Method became popular in Europe, phoneticians Henry Sweet, Wilhelm Viëtor, and Paul Passy developed International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and became part of the Reform movement in language teaching in the 1890s. These phoneticians contributed to language teaching in advocating that the spoken form of a language is primary and should be taught first. They also believed learners should be given phonetic training to establish good speech habits.

In the late 1930s and the early 1940s, the Modern Language Association of America promoted the Reading Approach till World War II broke out and U.S. military hired linguists to develop the Audiolingual Approach, which drew heavily on structural linguistics and behavior psychology. In Britain, the Oral or Situational Approach was born for the same political reasons. This approach organizes structures around situations to provide the learner opportunities to practice the target language.

In the past fifty years after World War II, English language teaching has again gone through dramatic transitions in methodology: from the conventional, authoritative teacher-centered instruction to the learner-centered mode of instruction. A variety of teaching methods emerged—the Silent Way, Community Language Learning, Cognitive Code Method, the Natural Approach, Total Physical Response (TPR), Suggestopedia, Cooperative Learning, Whole Language Learning, Multiple Intelligences Approach --each has had its prime time (Hung, 1992; Lin, 2003; Pica, 1997; Richards & Rodgers, 1986). This list of foreign language methodology is not meant to be exhaustive but to illustrate the diverse ways of teaching foreign language. Hung

argues that since each approach has its strengths and weaknesses the proliferation of pedagogy serves to verify that there is simply no best way to teach a foreign language. Besides, to deliver successful and effective instruction, the teacher needs to take many factors into consideration. One method appears right in a situation may not work with another group of students. Communication, especially that involves face-to-face interaction, is a contextualized sociocultural activity. Therefore, Celce-Murcia (2001) suggests teachers, to make wise instructional decisions, to learn more about the various approaches and methods and then, “adapt, don’t adopt” (p. 10).

The history of foreign language methodology discloses a characteristic of the field: shifts of language instruction often go with changes in attitudes and values of the society and the profession is always committed to the search for something better serves learning needs. Whereas new features of earlier approaches arose in reaction to perceived inadequacies of the previous approach(es), latest innovations propose to improve practice as a result of advancement in theoretical understanding in recent decades (Celce-Murcia, 2001), for instance, the surfacing of the Communicative Approach in the 1970s.

The Communicative Approaches

The Communicative Approaches emerged as an outgrowth of the work of anthropological linguists who viewed language primarily as a system for communication (Celce-Murcia, 2001). It assumes that the goal of language teaching is learner ability to communicate in the target language. As a consequence, the content of a language course includes semantic notions and social functions in addition to subordinate linguistic structures.

The Natural Approach

One example of the Communicative Approaches is the Natural Approach proposed by Tracy Terrell and Stephen Krashen in 1977 (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). The Natural Approach is different from the Natural Method that had become known as the Direct Method (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). It attracted a wide interest because it draws on Krashen's influential theory of second language acquisition, the Monitor Model. Krashen and Terrell have identified the Natural Approach with traditional approaches that were based on the use of language in communicative situations without recourse to the native language and without reference to grammatical analysis or drilling (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

The input hypothesis. Krashen's view of language acquisition provides a theoretical base for the Natural Approach, especially the input hypothesis of the monitor model, which also includes the acquisition/learning hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, and the affective filter hypothesis. Based on the Monitor Model, the Natural Approach emphasizes exposure, or *input*, rather than practice, optimizes emotional preparedness for learning, provides a prolonged period of attention to what the learners hear before attempt to produce language, and fosters a willingness to use written and other materials as a source of comprehensible input (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Like other communicative approaches, the Natural Approach focuses on teaching communicative abilities, but it is criticized as having no theory of language, except that it stresses on the primacy of meaning and views that a language is essentially its lexicon (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

In the Natural Approach, language is viewed as a vehicle for communicating meaning and messages. Krashen and Terrell (1983) contend that "acquisition can take place only when people understand message in the target language (p. 19). Yet, they also believe language learning entails mastery of structures by stages. "The input hypothesis states that in order for acquirers to

progress to the next stage in the acquisition of the target language, they need to understand input language that include a structure that is part of the next stage” (p. 32). Such “comprehensible input” is referred with the formula “ $i+1$ ” meaning input that contains grammatical structures slightly above the learner’s present level (i).

Krashen regard the input hypothesis central to all acquisition (“natural” learning as opposed to conscious knowledge gained through formal instruction) and also has implications for classroom practice:

1. As much comprehensible input as possible must be presented.
2. Speaking is a result of acquisition and not its cause. Speech cannot be taught directly, but emerges as a result of building competence via comprehensible input.
3. If input is understood, and there is enough of it, $i+1$ will be automatically provided.
4. In order to lower the affective filter, student work should center on meaningful communication rather than on form; input should be interesting and so contribute to a relaxed classroom atmosphere. (Gass & Selinker, 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

A basic assumption in the Natural Approach is that language acquirers are like processors of comprehensible input. They are challenged by input that is slightly above his or her current level of competence. The learners’ role will change according to their stage of linguistic development. Significant to these changing roles are learner decisions on when to speak, what to speak about, and what linguistic expressions to use in speaking. The learners are expected to participate in communication activities with other learners (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

In contrast, the teacher is the primary source of comprehensible input and class time is devoted primarily to providing input for acquisition. Besides, the teacher creates an interesting, friendly classroom atmosphere to lower affective filter for learning. It is also the teacher’s

responsibility to choose and arrange a rich mix of classroom activities, incorporating a variety of group size, content and contexts (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

The interactionist view. While Krashen's theory is well acknowledged, the input hypothesis is also criticized as being circular and self-contradictory (Liao, 2007). In an effort to define and describe comprehensible input, Long (1980, 1983) proposed the second language interactionist view. Long (1983) agrees with Krashen in that comprehensible input is necessary for language acquisition (Gass & Selinker, 2001; Lightbown & Spata, 1999). However, interactionists are more concerned with how input is made comprehensible; some examples of suggested conversational modifications to promote understanding are comprehension checks, clarification requests, and self-repetition or paraphrase (Lightbown & Spata, 1999). In fact, research shows that native speakers consistently use these conversational modifications, known as foreigner talk, in sustained conversation with non-native speakers (Gass & Selinker, 2001).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

CLT is the most widely adopted contemporary language teaching approach. It grew out of the dissatisfaction with structuralism and the Situational Methods, originates in the British language teaching tradition in the late 1960s (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Since mid-1970s, both American and British proponents have come to see it as an approach that aims to (1) make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and (2) develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication. It is so comprehensive in scope that no single model is universally accepted as authoritative. In fact, it is more a group of approaches than a single methodology.

Howatt (1985) recognizes there is a "strong" and a "weak" version of CLT. The weak version stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for

communicative purposes and attempts to integrate such activities into a wider program of language teachings; this could be described as “learning to use.” The strong version, on the other hand, advances the claim that language is acquired through communication, so that it is not merely activating an existing knowledge of the language, but stimulating the development of the language system itself; this could be described as “using English to learn it” (p. 279).

Richards and Rodgers (1986) point out salient features of CLT. CLT focuses on communication and contextual factors in language use. When a language is being used for communication, the broader sociocultural context contributes to the interaction; factors to be considered include participants, their behavior and beliefs, the objects of linguistic discussion, word choice, and the surrounding culture (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Another dimension of CLT, its learner-centered and experience-based view of second or foreign language teaching is frequently cited. CLT values individual learner’s interests, styles, needs, and goals and encourages teachers to develop learning materials on the particular needs manifested by the class. It believes the ideal curriculum consists of well-selected experiences. Its proponents advocate for teaching around tasks and procedures.

As an approach growing out of dissatisfaction with traditional approaches to foreign language teaching, CLT presents a contrast against traditional teaching approach in many ways. They are ruled out in Table 1 as follows:

From the above table, it is imaginable that in CLT, the emphasis on the process of communication, rather than mastery of language form leads to unconventional learner roles (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). The learners act as negotiators between the self, the learning process and the object of learning. Learning emerges during the interaction, which implies that the learner should contribute as much as he gains, and thereby learn in an interdependent way.

Students are expected to interact primarily with each other, rather than with the teacher; cooperatively successful communication is achieved through joint effort and similarly, failed communication is a joint responsibility of learners (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

As for the teacher, there are several roles to assume. Richards and Rodgers (1986) provide a description of the teacher in two main roles: the first role is to facilitate the communication process between all participants and between these participants and the activities and texts. The second role is to act as an independent participant within the learning-teaching group, so to fulfill the first role. A set of secondary roles for the teacher arise from the two main ones: as an organizer of resources and as a resource himself, as a guide in the classroom procedures and activities, as a researcher and learner to contribute knowledge and abilities, as a needs analyst, as a counselor, and as a group process manager. It takes adequate knowledge and training to make a competent CLT teacher.

The theory of communicative competence. Communicative competence is the starting point of communication. Teaching toward communicative competence is CLT's chief goal. With the prevailing of communicative approaches, the theory of communicative competence has drawn much attention and the teaching of oral communication skills has become the focal point in EFL classrooms.

According to Richards and Rodgers (1986), Hymes coined the term communicative competence to contrast Chomsky's linguistic view of competence (which is used in contrast with performance). Chomsky (1957) demonstrated the then current standard structural linguistic theories were unable to account for the fundamental characteristic of language, that is, the creativity and uniqueness of individual sentences. Chomsky (1965) focuses on the abstract

Table 1

Contrast between Traditional Teaching Approaches and the Communicative Approaches

	Traditional Approaches	Communicative Approaches
1. Focus in learning	Focus is on the language as a structural system of grammatical patterns.	Focus is on communication.
2. Selecting language items	This is done on linguistic criteria alone.	This is done on the basis of what language items the learner needs to know in order to get things done.
3. Sequencing language items	This is determined on linguistic ground.	This is determined on other grounds with the emphasis on content, meaning, and interest.
4. Degree of coverage	The aim is to cover the whole picture of language structure by systematic linear progression.	The aim is to cover, in any particular phase, only what learner needs and sees as important.
5. View of language	A language is seen as unified entity with fixed grammatical patterns and a core of basic words.	The variety of language is accepted, and seen as determined by the character of particular communicative contexts.

Table 1 (continued).

	Traditional Approaches	Communicative Approaches
6. Type of language use	The language tends to be formal and bookish.	Genuine everyday language is emphasized.
7. Criterion of success	The aim is to have students produce formally correct sentences.	The aim is to have students communicate effectively and in a manner appropriate to the context they are working in.
8. Emphasis of language skills	Reading and writing are stressed.	Spoken interactions are regarded as at least as important as reading and writing.
9. Teacher/student roles	The relationship tends to be teacher-centered.	The relationship is student-centered.
10. Attitude to errors	Incorrect utterances are seen as deviations from the norms of grammar.	Partially correct and incomplete utterances are seen as such rather than just “wrong.”
11. similarity/dissimilarity to natural language learning	The instruction reverses the natural language learning process by concentrating on the form of utterances rather than on content.	The teaching resembles the natural learning process in that the content of the utterances is emphasized rather than the form.

(Adapted from Hung, 1992)

abilities speakers possess that enable them to produce grammatically correct sentences in a language, while Hymes holds that a more general theory is needed to incorporate communication and culture. In Hymes' view, a person who acquires communicative competence acquires both knowledge and ability for language use (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

Canale and Swain (1980) adapt Hymes' theory and propose four dimensions of the ability to communicate in a language:

- Grammatical competence: the knowledge of the language code (including rules of phonology, orthography, vocabulary, word formation and sentence formation).
- Sociolinguistic competence: the mastery of the sociocultural code of language use (rules for the expression and understanding of appropriate social meanings and grammatical forms in different contexts, including vocabulary, politeness, and style in a given situation).
- Discourse competence: the ability to combine language structures into different types of cohesive and coherent text (e.g. letter, political speech, poetry, academic essay, cooking recipe). Cohesion refers to how sentence elements are tied together via reference, repetition, synonymy, etc. and coherence refers to how texts are constructed.
- Strategic competence: the knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies which can enable us to overcome difficulties when communication breakdowns occur and enhance the efficiency of communication, in other words, a repertoire of compensatory strategies that help with a variety of communication difficulties.

Implications of the theory of communicative competence. Lazaraton (2001) observes that the impact of communicative competence theory on foreign language teaching cannot be overstated. First of all, it is no longer acceptable to focus only on developing students' grammatical competence. Nowadays, a balance of focus is expected to stress both accuracy and fluency. Fluency is commonly understood as the ability to link units of speech together with facility and without strain or inappropriate slowness or undue hesitation (Lazaraton, 2001, p. 104). But there is a broader definition suggesting a more holistic sense of fluency as "natural language use" (p. 104), which is likely to take place when speaking activities focus on meaning and its negotiation, when speaking strategies are used, and when overt correction is minimized. This second definition is certainly consistent with the aims of many EFL classrooms today where the negotiation of meaning is a major goal, notes Lazaraton (2001).

The second implication of communicative competence theory is that multiple skills should be taught whenever possible. EFL educators have noticed the importance of integration of the four language skills (e.g., Cortese, 1985; Hsu, 2004). All the language skills are interrelated and studies report that learning to write contributes to learning to read, understand, and speak (Hsu, 2004). Therefore, language teachers should always connect speaking, listening, and pronunciation teaching although the focus may highlight one or another.

Another prominent feature of contemporary oral skill instruction is training learners to use strategies and encouraging strategy use. Lazaraton (2001) maintains that language learners must become competent at using language learning strategies such as hesitation devices and appeals for help. Results of a study conducted by O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Russo and Kupper (1985) indicate that strategy training can be effective for integrative language tasks. By the same token, Lessard-Clouston (1997) suggests that language teaching professionals

model the strategies both in classrooms and in their own foreign language learning, as a way to encourage students reflect on their own learning and develop strategy application.

A final feature of the current EFL classroom is that students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. Learner autonomy has become a frequent topic since learner-centrality is found beneficial to learning. Littlejohn (1983) indicates that a learner-centered approach does not just generally promote learning, but also specifically leads to successful language learning experience in a more conducive classroom atmosphere. In a similar vein, Nunan (1995) holds a strong support of learner involvement in making educational decision and emphasizes learner autonomy in learner-centered curriculum.

A closer look at these features of communicative competence immediately points to the wisdom of those humanists and sociocultural theorists discussed earlier in this chapter. By focusing on both accuracy and fluency, it is more likely to avoid producing the inarticulate genius “who by his operations and conclusions, reveals a deep grasp of a subject, but not the ability to ‘say how it goes’” or the articulate idiot, the student ‘who is full of seemingly appropriate words but has no matching ability to use the ideas for which the words presumably stand’ (Bruner, 1960, P. 55). When all four language skills are emphasized, each separate skill will be enhanced, as Bruner states, “[a]n understanding of fundamental principles and ideas... appears to be the main road to adequate ‘transfer of training’” (1960, p. 25) Besides, Gardner has informed us that the multiple intelligences in each individual, although independent, tend to complement each other. Although Confucius did not specifically teach language, he expected his disciples to employ various learning strategies to facilitate understanding. Rousseau’s *Emile* is one of the best known treatises on education that emphasizes the child, calling for autonomy of the learner. All these educational principles weave together to underpin communicative approach

to EFL practice. When considering the close relationship between language and culture, learning by doing, and contextual factors in interaction, Vygotsky, Dewey, and Bruner support the ideas.

At this point, Markee's (2002) warning sounds shocking, "...we must remain mindful that we do not assume that English necessarily provides a one-size-fit-all solution to fundamental issues of individual and societal development" (p. 272). Markee continues, "The role of English as a resource for development remains highly ambiguous and controversial" (p. 271) due to a variety of political, ethical, political, and professional problems. We need to investigate the implications for EFL practice in depth.

A Pedagogical Shift toward Cultural Responsiveness

Lately, English teaching methodology is going through another transition. For its emphasis on language as meaningful communication (language use) rather than language as form (language analysis), CLT has been regarded as the ideal methodology in language teaching (Liu, 2005; Zhang, 2004). However, due to a broadening scope and diversity of English and the increasing learner need of a balance of communication, instruction, and corrective feedback (Hu, 2005; Liao, 2007; Lightbown & Spata, 1999; Liu, 2005; Markee, 2000; Pica, 1997; Warschauer, 2000), there is a call for methodological shift.

English as a World Language

English has so widely spread all over the world that much discussion is brought up about how it impacts the survival of other languages and causes sensitive claims of national identity. Terms like English "colonising", English "invasion", "endangered languages", and "linguistic genocide" are familiar to linguists today (Burns, 2004, p. 4). Despite some small nations' resistance to English, with the assistance of electronically transmitted information and

telecommunication through the Internet and the World Wide Web, English will continue to be the dominant worldwide language, at least in a transitional situation (Burns, 2004; Kachru, 1982). However, Burns (2004) predicts there will be an increasing “messiness” (p. 6) of English varieties, which is an outcome of so many bi- and multilingual speakers using English in multilingual situations. As a matter of fact, new “hybrid” (p. 6) forms are now common where English mixes with other languages, ranging from Standard English, to a purely local form, to anything in between. Some examples of such varieties are pidgins, creoles, Singlish, and African-American Vernacular English (Siegel, 1999; Burns, 2004).

With all these varied forms of English hybrids came the argument that there should be a single standard based on native speaker norms to serve across all contexts. Yet, the proposal is deemed unrealistic by some scholars judging from a sociolinguistic point of view (Kachru, 1982; Oxford, 2004). Oxford explains, considering the fact that English is now so dispersed across the world, it is more important that speakers can communicate with each other than setting a standard that might be impossible for all to meet. Some further argue that the traditional emphasis of the standard in many English language teaching contexts could lead to misconception about language, because the stress of standard disproves the adaptation, creativity, and hybridity, which are essential for any language to develop and thrive (Burns, 2004). A strong attachment to the standard form, as scholars warn, directs English teaching and learning to a main purpose of uttering the language as an imitation, instead of communication (Cook, 1999; Oxford, 2004).

Besides, research findings have revealed a positive role for language varieties and thus repel concerns about interference of the stigmatized variety being in the way of the standard (Cook, 1999; Siegel, 1997, 1999). It is generally accepted that knowledge of first language

contributes to second or foreign language learning (e.g., Barnitz, 1986, 2006; Cook, 1999).

Language learning is naturally enhanced when new language material is based on prior language knowledge, thus becomes “comprehensible” and predictable (Krashen, 1981). Classroom activities that help learners examine features of their own varieties are found useful in increasing learner perception of language distance and help them acquire the knowledge needed to reinforce acquisition of the standard.

CLT's Impacts on Local Cultures

The communicative approach has had the upper hand in foreign language teaching in the past three decades (e.g., Pica, 1997). However, a number of English educators have questioned about the appropriateness of CLT approach, especially in Asian countries (e.g. Burns, 2004, Hu, 2003; Hu, 2005). They argue that dominant western-based models of English language teaching are neglecting local cultural and linguistic needs. Some comment that with the strong emphasis on English-only in the classroom CLT overlooks the value and relevance of bilingual dimensions of language learning and it takes for granted values and approaches not easily assumed in Eastern world view (Chowdhury, 2003; Cook, 1999; Hu, 2005; Li. 1998). For example, Liu (2005) identified traditional Chinese culture and values as the dominating factors in the complexity in students’ adaptation to the American culture-based CLT within the Taiwanese culture. It is also claimed that emphasis on English use may threaten the right of children to be educated in their own language (Nunan, 2003).

Teachers in non-inner-circle countries (Burns, 2004; Chowdhury, 2003; Li, 1998; Liu, 2005; Yu, 2001; Zhang, 2004) have voiced their concern and identified issues such as:

- the widespread disconnection between the syllabus approaches recommended and the public examination systems;

- student resistance to the participatory approaches demanded by CLT methodologies; teachers' feelings of insecurity and lack of fit with such foreign methods;
- the considerable redefinitions of teachers' and learners' traditional roles suggested by CLT approaches;
- large classes and limited time to prepare interactive materials and activities;
- lack of access to relevant local materials and the authentic samples of language.

As Chowdhury (2003) describes, in a sense, language teachers are “cultural warriors” (CLT and TEFL context, ¶ 6) and language classrooms become “battlegrounds in culture wars” (CLT and TEFL context, ¶ 6). It is repeatedly pointed out that culture plays an important role in the implementation of CLT. On one hand, “western-trained teachers saw themselves as transmitting a culture essentially alien to the students by means of a technique alien to them and, in the process, making demands on students which did not match their present level of competence” (Chowdhury, 2003, Teachers' role, ¶ 6). On the other hand, locally trained teachers found the traditional way worked better and traditional viewing of the teacher could be used positively; therefore, were not ready to totally embrace the western-forged CLT approach. A participant in Chowdhury's (2003) study expressed, “what we probably need is something in between communicative and our traditional way of teaching the students” (Learners' role, ¶ 3). The comment seems to generally fit in many EFL countries (Cook, 1999; Li, 1998; Liao, 2007; Liu, 2005; Pica, 1997).

Burns (2004) suggests that a new methodology needs to be found where students are engaged in meaningful speaking, writing, listening, reading, viewing, and visual representing activities (Barnitz, 2002; Speaker & Barnitz, 1999) but without the full-on communicative approach. On the same note, Chowdhury (2003) maintains that EFL countries should *adapt* to

the local context, rather than uncritically *adopt* westernized forms of CLT. Li (1998) shares the viewpoint and urges EFL countries to develop teaching methods in their own contexts by taking into account the specific educational theories and realities in their countries. In any case, a simultaneous respect for cultural continuity needs to be attended to, besides the focus on enhancing communicative language competence, because culture and language are functionally and mutually complementary.

As such, rising in response to the demand, the notion of “appropriate pedagogy” (Burns, 2004) is suggested as an alternative way of thinking about language teaching approaches in the social and educational context of a particular country. Educators’ responses to the call include the proposal of an integration of contemporary meaning-based approaches and traditional form-focused instructional approaches with appropriate correction (Liao, 2007; Pica, 1997) and the hybrid course approach which advocates technology integration into EFL practice (Liu, 2005). Chen and Chang (2004) along with Liu argue that an integration of technology appears to be particularly timely for this electronic/multimedia era of linguistic and cultural diversity. In short, in an age of tremendous amount of language and culture contact, a more culturally responsive EFL pedagogy seems imperatively needed.

A Culturally Responsive EFL Curriculum

Departing from cultural considerations in pedagogy, I attempt to describe a culturally responsive EFL curriculum. As both culture and curriculum are all-encompassing in nature, this is merely attempted to grasp the very fundamental essence in a succinct manner.

Elias and Merriam (2005) argued that curriculum is a vehicle, not an end, to assist learners to grow and develop in accordance with their needs and interests. Therefore, an EFL curriculum is an interactive process developed among the learner, the teacher, the materials, and

the environment, particularly related with the teaching and learning of English in a context in the learner's native language. Pinar (2004) asserts that "curriculum is embedded in national cultures," (p. 93), while Bruner (1996) discusses curriculum as a mirror that reflects cultural beliefs, social and political values and organization. In a strong tone Apple (2004) argues that schools are undeniable mechanisms of cultural distribution. At the same time, Joseph, Bravmann, Windschitl, Mikel, & Green (2000) acknowledge curriculum as cultural in every sense.

"Using a cultural lens, we can begin to regard curriculum not just as an object (content), but as a series of interwoven dynamics. Curriculum conceptualized as culture educates us to pay attention to belief systems, values, behaviors, language, artistic expression, the environment in which education takes place, power relationships, and most importantly, the norms that affect our sense about what is right or appropriate" (p. 19).

EFL curriculum is culturally sensitive. Essentially, language and culture are highly involved in each other; we can not discuss issues of either one without mentioning the other. Scholars point out that as EFL is English taught to speakers of other languages, it is always presented in a cultural setting different from that of English-speaking countries, and therefore, inevitably arouses sensitive cultural issues. While foreign language teachers have a wide array of pedagogical options to choose from, instructional decisions need to be made taking into consideration of various curricula components.

In answering the question "What exactly is language teaching?" Ellis (1984) develops a model of seven curricula components, with the classroom as the focal point because it is where the interactions occur. The following discussion of cultural implications of an EFL curriculum is based on this model.

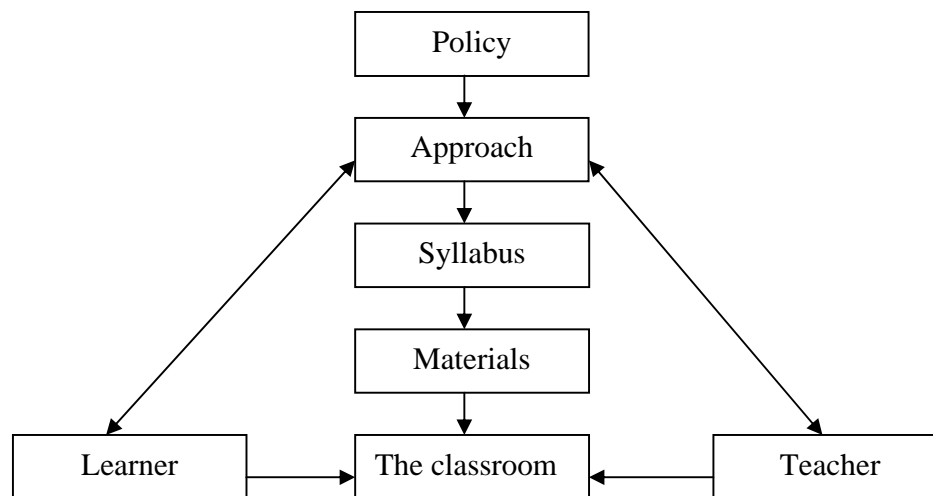


Figure 1. Ellis's Model of Language Teaching (Ellis, 1984, p. 193).

Ellis (1984) identifies seven essential components

- The national and school *policy* reflects socio-economic aspirations of learners in the country and community. Many examples are present in the national educational policies of Asian countries (Gorsuch, 2000; Nunan, 2003).
- *Approach* is underpinned by theories that provide a sound basis for orienting language teaching ideologically. The earlier discussion about CLT illustrates how cultural concerns affect pedagogical paradigm.
- “*Syllabus* design involves the twin procedures of selection and grading” (p. 193), thus reflects teachers’ and or the society’s beliefs and values.
- EFL *Materials* in the 21st century, as the means for achieving the core instructional goals, can include traditional text and new cyber-genres, audio-visual aides, World Wide Web, and the Internet to present culturally diverse content for instruction (Au, 2006; Barnitz, 2002). The use of technology in the “new times” (Anstey & Bull, 2006, p. 1) particularly brings up discourse regarding its cultural aspect.

- The *classroom* is where contact between the teacher, the learner and the materials occur. Ellis cautions that what takes place in the classroom will always remain, to some extent, unpredictable due to the negotiation nature inherent in all interactions. Besides, social goals will always arise and affect interactions happening in the classroom.
- The teacher is also an outcome of the culture. Ellis (1984) describes in detail what a teacher brings to the classroom,

The teacher brings to the classroom more than a lesson plan and teaching materials; he also brings his personal opinions of what constitutes behavior for the teacher and pupil in language classrooms, his personality, his communication skills, his prior knowledge of the pupils (and/or pupils similar to them), his knowledge of the [target language] and in some cases of the student's mother tongues and he may also possess some knowledge of theoretical and applied linguistics. (p. 194)

Issues of proper candidacy for EFL teachers, specifically the native speaker fallacy (Burns, 2004), have long been debated (e.g. Liu, 1999; Yang, 2004). Educators generally agree that competency, rather than ethnicity, is far more important in making an effective EFL teacher. EFL professionals need relevant academic background, solid training in English teaching pedagogy, and sufficient awareness of individual and cross-cultural variable in the learner, if productive instruction is to occur (Barnitz, 1986, 2002; Cook, 2004; Filmore & Snow, 2000; Govardhan, Nayar, Sheorey, 1999; Harper & de Jong, 2004; Wan, 2001)

- The *pupil*, Like the teacher, also brings a host of individual factors to the classroom.

Again, in Ellis' word, these learner factors include

“his personality, his knowledge of what language is and does, his world knowledge, his knowledge of his mother tongue, a set of attitudes and motivation for learning the target language, an aptitude for learning, a cognitive style and maybe some notion of what is the best way to learn a [foreign] language. (p. 194)

Each learner's learning profile is culturally unique to the specific individual (Y.-U. Chen, 2006). Cultural related differences are often reflected in aspects such as cross-cultural schemata, intelligence profile, learning styles, language learning strategies, affective traits, world knowledge, and metalinguistic awareness (Barnitz, 1986, 2002; Cook, 2004; Gass & Selinker, 2001; Oxford, 2004). In particular relevant to foreign language learning is that social and cultural backgrounds define language ability (Anstey & Bull, 2006).

Section Summary

An overview of certain areas of EFL practice is attempted in the above section. The brief history of EFL methodology offers a sense of history, and then a closer look at the communicative approaches arrives at a better understanding of two approaches: the Natural Approach and the Communicative Language Teaching. Coming next is a discussion of the need of cultural responsiveness in EFL practice and therefore, a description of such an EFL curriculum follows. This overview is taken in a sociocultural perspective with learner centrality in mind. It lines up with humanistic constructivism and aims to achieve a respect for every linguistic and cultural variation. Such perspective explains why differentiated instruction is

needed in the educational framework in Taiwan, particularly in the EFL classroom, in which traditional teacher-centered instruction is still in vogue. It also makes it clear that the specific form of assessment in this study, tiered performance tasks, aims to address learner needs in consideration of individual differences and interests by offering various choices. This leads to the next section on assessment.

Assessment

Assessment has a long history serving a function of social needs of the time; particularly in Chinese societies, it leads to a culturally deep-seated reverence for education (Loewe, 1986). However, disadvantages came about as byproducts during the long development of around 2200 years (Gipps, 1999). This section starts with a quick look at types of assessment, purposes of assessment, impact of standardized tests, and then a closer examination of formative assessment, as well as one of its various forms, performance-based assessment.

Types of Assessment

Shavelson (2006) and Chuang (1999) briefly describe the two broad categories of assessment: summative and formative assessment. The former, the traditional product approach, provides a summary judgment about learning achieved after some time with the goal of informing external audiences primarily for certification and accountability purposes. The latter, the new process approach, gathers and uses information about students' knowledge and performance to reduce discrepancy between students' current learning state and the desired state via pedagogical actions (e.g., feedback). In other words, it functions as a part of instruction to support and enhance learning, instead of presenting barriers to the development of intellectual abilities (Shepard, 2000). Thus, formative assessment informs primarily teachers and students, but it has been used for summative purposes as well.

Existing literature has mentioned formative assessment interchangeably as new or innovative (Brown & Hudson, 1998), authentic (Tompkins, 2002), alternative (Brown & Hudson, 1998; Norris, Brown, Hudson, & Yoshioka, 1998), and constructivist (Ecclestone & Pryor, 2003; Roos & Hamilton, 2004; Shepard, 2000). In contrast, summative assessment is traditional, classical, positivist, and standardized (e.g., Delandshere & Petrosky, 1994; Hood, 1998). In language testing, examples of innovative types of tests include oral proficiency interviews, role-play tests, performance assessments, portfolio, conferences, diaries, self-assessments, to cite just a few. As for summative assessment, true-false, matching, and multiple-choice assessments are some of the cases. Hot debates about advantages of formative and summative assessment have been going on for years. For instance, some researchers and practitioners have been concerned about “lingering questions regarding the general technical adequacy of performance-based assessments, most notably, the crucial issues of reliability and validity” (Hood, 1998, p. 190); therefore, they do not totally support the claim that performance-based assessment can do a better job than traditional tests. However, despite reliability and validity issues, some theorists obviously favor formative assessment as reflected in its increasing popularity and variety. Brown and Hudson (1998) argued, “virtually all of the various test types are useful for some purpose, somewhere, sometime” (p. 657). In other words, all types of tests are important to keep because they all have distinct strengths and weaknesses. On the same note, Lynch (2001) promotes an open mind to embrace new validity frameworks and thus the combination of measurement and non-measurement techniques for language assessment and program evaluation.

Purposes of Assessment

Tompkins (2002) indicates that in authentic assessment teachers examine both the processes and the artifacts or products that students produce. Meanwhile, students participate in

reflecting on and self-assessing their learning. Authentic assessment has five purposes (Tompkins, 2002), from which an adapted version of functions that general assessment should strive to serve are as follows:

- To document mileposts in students' development
- To identify students' strengths in order to plan for instruction
- To document students' learning activities and projects
- To determine grades
- To help teachers learn more about how students become strategic learners

It is clear that assessment functions not only as a way “to monitor and promote individual students' learning”, but can be used “to examine and improve teaching practices” (Shepard, 2000, p. 12). Advocates for new assessment see it as an integral part of, instead of simply an add-on of, teaching and learning (Shavelson, 2006; Shepard, 2000; Tompkins, 2002). If carefully planned and well implemented, “good assessment tasks are inter-changeable with good instructional tasks” (Roos & Hamilton, 2004, p. 8). Yatvin (2004) suggests an interdependent relationship between assessment and teaching. She uses the metaphor of assessment-teaching loop to illustrate how both assessment and instruction grow stronger in a continuing relationship. Through a cycle of assessing and teaching, teaching and assessing, teachers evaluate how well they taught and decide what to teach next while seeing how well students have learned.

Assessment also mediates teaching and learning. The ultimate intention of classroom assessment is to inform and influence instruction, thus it predictably affects student learning. Duffy, Duffy and Jones (1997) have proposed a concept of “preventive maintenance” (p. 16) about assessment as a tool to achieve top performance. Ecclestone and Pryor (2003) even argue that assessment has deeper educational implication: “the outcomes of assessment practices have

profound effects on children's identity as learners and their self-esteem" (p. 484), which is important in "shaping students' later learning careers and future life opportunities" (p. 485). Assessment, teaching, and learning closely relate to one another; as Roos and Hamilton (2004) describe the relationship, "monitoring is mutual; and the resultant exchanges foster human development" (Constructivist Assessment, ¶1).

Yet in reality, not all evaluation tools result in positive enhancement of learning as expected. First, the prevailing standardized testing fails to attain true understanding of how well students can perform (Bertrand, 1994). Second, educators have observed negative impact on teaching practices and curriculum content produced by teaching to standardized testing (Bertrand, 1994; Norris et al., 1998). Still worse, traditional, inauthentic forms of test demoralize learners "where students take little responsibility for their own learning, and criteria remain mysterious" (Shepard, 2000, p. 12).

As Bruner noted in 1960, an examination "can be bad in the sense of emphasizing trivial aspects of a subject...encouraging teaching in a disconnected fashion and learning by rote" (p.30). Almost 40 years later, American educators still lament over current academic culture that discourages us from living connected lives: "We are distanced by a grading system that separates teachers from students" and "by competition that makes students and teachers alike wary of their peers" (Palmer, 1998, p. 36). Same grief permeates the hearts of conscientious EFL teachers and learners in Taiwan. As a society dominated by the culture that first developed examination, Taiwan is by no means exempted from the powerful influences of uniform tests. Participants in Hung's (1992) study shared their English learning experiences as mostly passive and un-motivating grammar drills. According to Liao (2007), more than 80 percent of English teachers in Taiwan adopt the teacher-centered grammar-translation method due to potent,

negative influence from traditional summative paper-and-pen examination. Most of these EFL teachers over-emphasize reading and grammar, while ignoring other language skills and thus cultivating unsuccessful language learners.

Tests from early in the century, developed from a behaviorist perspective, emphasized rote recall to an astonishing degree (Shepard, 2000). Various testing types—recall, completion, matching, and multiple-choice—were all tied closely with what was deemed important to learn. Roos and Hamilton (2004) find it still true that curriculum content often describes the expected capabilities of students in specified areas and curriculum is at its best a sequence of separate content units; full command of each may be accomplished as a single act. Such “unit” conception of subject matter expects students to master each skill at the desired level and close the door on long-lasting and meaningful learning.

Current practice of assessment not only influences attainment, but also affects learner identity. Black and Wiliam’s (2001) indicated that in the United Kingdom and elsewhere as well the everyday practice of assessment in classroom is plagued with problems concerning effective learning and negative impact in particular. According to their research, even enthusiastic teachers administer tests that encourage rote and superficial learning but are unaware of it. In addition, marking suggests low achievers that they lack ability to learn, so de-motivates such pupils. Exploring various factors that affect teachers’ assessment practices and learner identity, Ecclestone and Pryor (2003) confirm that assessment systems have profound effects on students’ learning identities and self-esteem. The impact can be evident even at the very earliest stages of schooling. They further maintain that children’s ability to perform in formative assessment situation is likely to shape students’ later learner careers and life opportunities.

The disappointment at classical tests has urged many frustrated educators to experiment a wide variety of innovative assessment since the 1980s (Brown & Hudson, 1998). Formative assessment stands out for its potency in improving student learning and guiding instruction (Ecclestone & Pryor, 2003; Shavelson, 2006). However, it has been a rarely enacted practice due to generally limited teacher knowledge and competencies in assessment (Johnson, Thompson, Wallace, Hughes, & Manswell Butty, 1998).

Characteristics of Formative Assessment

A number of researchers and practitioners (e.g., Shavelson, 2006) actively advocate for formative assessment for “its positive, large-in-magnitude impact on student learning” (p. 64); therefore, “formative assessment...is at the heart of effective teaching (Black & Wiliam, 2001, p.1). Ecclestone and Pryor (2003) maintain that formative assessment is “a progressive force in learning” and better conceived as “an interactive pedagogy based on constructivist ideas about learning and integrated into a wide range of learning and support activities” (p. 472). In Roos and Hamilton’s (2004) opinion, constructivism formulates self- monitoring and the potential for self-direction, that is, the capacity to evaluate, build upon and, ultimately, transcend prior knowledge. Sadler (1989) had elaborated on the constructivist feature of formative assessment,

The indispensable conditions for improvement are that the *student...* is able to monitor continuously the quality of what is being produced *during the act of production itself...*In other words students have to be able to judge the quality of what they are producing and be able to regulate what they are doing during the doing of it. (p. 121)

Extending the line of argument, Black and Wiliam (2003) assert, “more will be gained from formative feedback where a test calls for the *mindfulness* that it helps to develop” (p. 631,

emphasis added). In a formative assessment, students advance their understanding from self-monitoring, self-judgment, self-assessment, and reflection during the entire process. According to Roos and Hamilton (2004), this is how the wholeness of instruction, the transformation of learning and the self-regulation of performance take place.

After examining features of alternative assessment suggested in various sources, Brown and Hudson (1998) compiled an impressive list of positive characteristics for this new form of assessment:

1. require students to perform, create, produce, or do something;
2. use real-world contexts or simulations;
3. are non-intrusive in that they extend the day-to-day classroom activities;
4. allow students to be assessed on what they normally do in class every day;
5. use tasks that represent meaningful instructional activities;
6. focus on process as well as products;
7. tap into higher level thinking and problem-solving skills;
8. provide information about both the strengths and weaknesses of students;
9. are multiculturally sensitive when properly administered
10. ensure that people, not machines, do the scoring, using human judgment;
11. encourage open disclosure of standards and rating criteria; and
12. call upon teachers to perform new instructional and assessment roles. (p. 654-655)

With these appealing characteristics, formative assessment can be an effective approach to information gathering and in diagnostic situations. Shepard (2000) claimed that a socio-constructivist view of alternative assessment should be pursued because it holds the most promise for using assessment to improve teaching and learning, although it is an idealization

and the abilities needed to implement it are daunting. To assist teachers teach and evaluate students in more interactive ways and establish equitable relationship with students, she offered several specific assessment strategies:

- Dynamic, on-going assessment—this helps teachers find out what a student is able to do independently as well as what can be done with adult guidance
- Prior knowledge—Students are likely to reveal their reasoning and experiences in open discussion or “instructional conversations” (p.11) so the teacher can picture a coherent vision of them
- Feedback—Scaffolding and expert tutoring allow teachers to use indirect forms of feedback to maintain student motivation and self-confidence while not ignoring student errors.
- Transfer—Like good teaching, good assessment constantly asks about old understanding in new ways, calls for new applications, and draws new connections.
- Explicit criteria—*Transparency* is central to the idea that students must have a clear understanding of the criteria by which their work will be assessed, to the extent that students can learn to evaluate their own work in the same way that their teacher would. It satisfies a fairness principle having access to evaluation criteria and giving students the opportunity to do well in what is expected.
- Self-assessment—Student self-assessment increases students’ responsibility for their own learning and makes the relationship between teachers and students more collaborative.
- Evaluation of teaching—in this practice the teacher models the commitment to using data systematically as it applies to their own role in the teaching and learning process.

Performance-based Assessment

Among various formative assessment forms, performance-based assessment has been recognized as a promising assessment that illustrates students' communicative competencies truthfully. Brown and Hudson (1998) provided detailed description of performance assessments. They pointed out that performance assessments require students to accomplish approximations of real-life, authentic tasks, usually using the productive skills of speaking or writing but also using reading or writing or combining skills. Performance assessments can take many forms from the fairly traditional to more recent developments. The range stretches from essay writing, interview, to problem-solving tasks, communicative pair-work tasks, role playing, and group discussions.

According to Brown and Hudson (1998), the primary advantage of performance assessment is that they can come close to eliciting authentic communication. Compared with traditional standardized multiple-choice tests, performance assessments provide more valid information on various areas of language skills:

- Measures of students' abilities to respond to real-life language tasks
- Estimates of students' true language abilities
- Predictions of students' future performances in real-life language situations (p. 662)

Another advantage of performance assessments is that they can be used to counteract the negative washback effects of standardized testing, even provide strong positive washback effects, if well-designed. Brown and Hudson (1998) defined washback as the effect of testing and assessment on the language teaching curriculum that is related to it; washback is also called test impact or test feedback. In their explanation, the authors indicated that washback can be either negative or positive. Negative washback is likely to occur when the assessment procedures in a curriculum do not communicate a curriculum's goals and objectives. On the contrary, positive

washback takes place if the tests measure the same types of materials and skills that are described in the objectives and taught in the courses. Therefore, it is crucial that the teacher carefully selects assessment strategies that reflect their expectations from the students. Brown and Hudson went on to emphasize the need of including multiple sources of information to obtain true picture of student learning.

Need for Developing Assessment Competencies

The strengths of formative assessment, especially the performance-based, seem to promise that teachers well versed in administering formative assessment are likely to avoid committing the mistake Palmer (1998) identified, “We are mistaken when we seek authority outside ourselves, in sources ranging from the subtle skills of group process to that less than subtle method of social control called grading...” (p. 32-33). The question here is how do teachers obtain adequate knowledge of this complex form of assessment and become skilled in using it? Sound teacher preparation and ongoing professional growth are the answers experts provided (Bailey, 2001; Johnson, et al., 1998; Shavelson, 2006; Shepard, 2000). To realize the contemporary constructivist educational visions, Shavelson proposes developing multiple teacher competencies in teacher education programs. Foreseeing the need to counteract habits acquired by pupils for teacher to implement formative assessment successfully, Shepard (2000) has cautioned educators to reconstruct teaching and classroom culture. Similarly, many in-service teachers need to take “substantial changes in their teaching and assessment practices as well as their beliefs and subject-matter knowledge” (p. 200), according to Johnson et al. These changes are unlikely to occur without appropriate support and guidance. Roos and Hamilton (2004), along with Shavelson, advocate for supported development for teachers. In addition, collegial

coaching is referred to as a different route of improving teaching practice (Bergen, Engelen, & Derksen, 2006).

As stressed, considerable reform is needed in sustained and continuous manner to enhance teachers' skills in using assessment, and in some situations, to change their attitudes about assessment. Shepard (2000) warned that given their own personal histories, teachers "are able to hate standardized testing and at the same time reproduce it faithfully in their own pre-post testing routines, if they are not given the opportunity to develop and try out other meaningful forms of assessment situated in practice" (p. 10). Yet, optimal utilization of alternative assessment should not be expected in one day. Until the vision is realized, which can only happen relatively slowly (Black & Wiliam, 2001; Gipps, 1999; Hird, 1995), teachers need to constantly update their knowledge of assessment.

Section Summary

This section first presents a general understanding of assessment, including types of assessment, purposes of assessment and the impact of standardized testing. Then, the educational strengths of formative assessment are introduced. In particular, one form of formative assessment, performance-based assessment, is discussed in terms of its advantages and thus calls for ongoing professional growth in assessment competencies. Researchers advocate for substantial changes in teaching and assessment practices as well as teachers' beliefs and subject-matter knowledge. However, this can only occur slowly. The present study is an effort to promote authentic assessment to inform and influence teaching as well as learning, which is needed for educational reform in Taiwan to support better English learning results.

English Education in Taiwan

The following section is to provide a setting for the present study. To know what the question is requires some knowledge of where it comes from. Therefore, a sketch of college English education in Taiwan, the Republic of China, is presented. The major areas of exploration are teaching mode and assessment issues.

Section Overview

The importance of language is especially evident in the world of school. Since instruction is mostly delivered through language, students must link the teacher's verbal messages with his or her personal conceptual, experiential, and linguistic frame of reference for learning to occur (Hung, 1992). As Tomlinson (1999) notes, "many school tasks are highly dependent on encoding, decoding, computation, and memorization" (p. 69). How and what message a teacher conveys in his/her instructional practice will profoundly influence the learners' concept of learning and learning results.

Test-driven Curriculum

Along with the popularity CLT has enjoyed in the past decades, communicative competence is well received and generally viewed in the field of EFL as a practical indicator of communication ability. In theory, language educators will aim to enhance students' proficiency level knowing what a speaker needs to acquire in order to be communicatively competent. However, practice does not always go with theory, rather, it is often test-driven (Gorsuch, 2000; Jeon & Hahn, 2006). While the educational system in Taiwan generally mirrors Western, particularly American, institutional structures, traditional examination concepts remain strong. The pressure for academic success is markedly intensive and schools are preparing students for tests more than for life (Chen, Warden, & Chang; 2005). Therefore, although the importance of

integrated language competence is recognized, the English education in Taiwan still emphasizes reading and writing abilities over speaking and listening skills (Liu, 2005), as the examinations are mostly given in the paper-and-pen format.

Generally Low English Proficiency

Research finds EFL practice in Asian-Pacific countries is not satisfactory. Nunan (2003) concludes his ambitious investigation of the impact of English as a global language on educational policies and practices in the Asia-Pacific region with a finding: all of the Asia-Pacific countries surveyed subscribe to principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and in many of them the governments spare no effort in promoting the approach. However, policy and pedagogical reality do not always match. Taiwan is one of the countries Nunan (2003) includes in his survey. He reported that the Taiwan governmental investment in elementary English education is large, but the hope is that this initiative will have a beneficial effect later on, resulting in higher levels of proficiency in English at the university level. This implies, and is also acknowledged by his participants, that the level of English proficiency among university students is quite low in terms of communicative use. As a matter of fact, low English proficiency of technological and vocational college students has alerted EFL educators in Taiwan (Lin, 1997).

In the same vein, Hung (1997) conducted an interview study to explore and describe teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in the technological and vocational education system from the perspectives of English teachers of technology institutes in Taiwan. His informants share common concerns over their students' English proficiency levels. Another consensus among the participants is that English education at college level should focus on the promotion of four language skills aiming at development of communicative competence for future job preparation.

Traditional Pedagogy Prevails

In an attempt to identify possible reasons why the effort currently in progress in Taiwan does not seem to be reflected in significant English language skills on the part of the students, Liao (2007) indicates that many students in Taiwan are struggling in the English classroom in which instruction is mostly whole-class, teacher-centered rote grammar-translation and of large class enrollments. Likewise, Liu's (2005) study reported that traditional language-teaching methods are still being used by some instructors. These instructors teach directly from textbooks, explain grammar and meaning of the text in Chinese and the students are asked to translate English sentences into Chinese. In other words, traditional instruction is mainly based on exhaustive repetition, focusing on facts but not for real-life communication. As a consequence, a learner's achievement is measured in terms of the number of words memorized and his or her mastery of grammatical structures, instead of application of skills in authentic situations. Nishimura (2000) terms results of such teacher-fronted, form-focused instruction "false beginners" in the sense that the students have developed grounding in grammar, but the ability to use this knowledge in communication is very limited.

There is ample evidence that teacher-centered, didactic classroom with a heavy emphasis on lecture and textbooks is neither conducive to long-term learning nor to warrant a transfer of knowledge to proper situations (Babcock, 1993; Liao, 2007; Nunley, 2006). Hung (1992) investigates perspectives of EFL learners in the Republic of China (Taiwan) and reaches the conclusion that there are sufficient data suggesting joint entrance examinations have a significantly negative influence on English education in Taiwan. The study indicates that improving entrance examinations is the most critical issue in improving EFL education in Taiwan. Based on findings of the study and suggestions of the participants, Hung has made five

recommendations, which include the following three related to EFL curriculum and entrance examinations:

- “English curriculum should encompass a wide variety of different purposes according to language learners’ genuine needs. The ability to be able to communicate in the target language should be the primary concern.
- Language classrooms should place more emphasis on students’ learning the four [now six] language skills. The class should be learner-centered, not teacher-centered. Students should be included in the process of decision making in EFL education development.
- Improve entrance examinations so that four language skills--speaking, listening, reading, and writing--can all be equally evaluated” (p. 188).

As a response to heated public opinions in Taiwan the Joint Public Senior High School (JPSHS) Entrance Examination was finally abolished in academic year 2001. In the following year (2002) Multi-route Promotion Program for Entering Universities was implemented to relieve high school graduates from the spell of taking university entrance examination (Government Information Office, 2007). However, it is observed that grammar-translation method of English instruction remains predominant, according to Liao (2007).

Need for Educational Reforms

EFL educators in Taiwan call for more fundamental educational reforms, in spite of the reduced pressure from entrance examinations. After all, results of changes in nationwide educational policy may take years to emerge and we have seen that policy may not be realized in reality (Nunan, 2003). Reform-minded educators believe to improve the quality of English education in Taiwan, down-to-earth changes such as innovative instruction (e.g., Liao, 2007),

alternative assessment and better teacher preparation (Dai, 2003; Guo, 1995) should be brought into daily practice. For centuries, the Chinese education system has accepted imitation through repetition as the route to understanding and creativity. The Chinese people have been deeply rootedly conditioned to rote memorization instructional techniques. Perhaps the best and basic way to change embeds in daily interactions occurred between the teacher and the students. In any case, teachers are still the key to tangible educational changes.

Realizing from his experience of teaching in China, Hird (1995) voiced a warning note: “any changes to be effected in the development of a communicative approach with Chinese characteristics will need to be implemented slowly and with sensitivity” (p. 24). He also suggests “educational change of any permanent consequence can be achieved only through culturally responsive reform” (p. 26)

Teachers’ beliefs and values are highly influential to students’ perceptions and concepts. Lan and Hung (2005) interviewed eight English teachers at technological institutes in Taiwan. The interviewees’ instructional beliefs are shown to be decisive factors in selecting the instructional goals, class activities, and patterns of classroom interaction. In addition, results of studies point out that teachers’ expectations have impact on students’ perceptions (Lee, 2005; Ma, 2005; Wang, 2005). What is implemented daily in the classroom has direct influences on the learners.

An Innovative Assessment Idea

In a learner-centered differentiating classroom, the teacher believes it is important to accommodate student differences in any possible aspect of the learning process. “While learning tasks need to be differentiated, so do assessment strategies”, assert Gregory and Chapman (2002, p. 55). As opposed to the traditional one-size-fits-all paper-and-pen test format, a variety of

performance tasks that are designed to suit different ability levels and are available for students to choose freely is quite unconventional for Chinese EFL college students. If a teacher is to promote the idea that assessment can be in many forms, rather than merely limited to the customary way, how will her students perceive the concept and practice? The present study aspires to explore the students' responses to such an innovative measure. It is hoped that through authentic assessment that addresses learner differences and provides students with free choices will allow the students to express other sides of themselves not seen in paper-and-pen work. More importantly, the differentiated assessment aims to encourage students to work toward the ultimate goal of English learning, which is being communicatively competent without neglecting or compromising either fluency or accuracy.

As pointed out above, most Chinese students are used to rote memorization as it works well for paper-and-pen tests that look for fixed, but not creative, answers. In a static practice of education, the learners may not be able to readily accept new evaluation measures. Considering that students might feel confused or hesitant encountering the new assessment strategy due to influences from traditional Chinese test culture and values (Arnold, 2000; Littlejohn, 1983), the teacher needs to be cautious in adopting new practice. In the present study, the instructor started differentiation with one aspect of instruction, assessment, and introduced tiered performance tasks in the final examination only. She was surely taking a small step at a time in the introduction of an innovative assessment idea to avoid drastic reactions.

Chapter Summary

The first section of the chapter presents an introduction to differentiated instruction. The following sections on humanism and constructivism provide theoretical underpinning for the approach. Then, the section on foreign language learning examines EFL pedagogy and indicates

the need for EFL practice to be responsive to local cultures. A general understanding of current assessment practices is attempted in the following section, which concludes that more use of formative assessment and sustained teacher professional growth in assessment competencies are needed for improved classroom practices. Finally, the last section looks at current English education in Taiwan to provide the context for the present study. Test-driven curriculum and teacher-centered teaching methods are identified as part of the reasons of the generally low English proficiency of university students in Taiwan.

As a response to the call for educational reforms, differentiated instruction is promising in offering learner-centered education and innovative assessment measures to promote learning. The tiered performance tasks in this study offer students choices in assessment that are flexible and take individual differences into consideration. Humanism enhances individuality and learner autonomy in the learning process, while constructivism in general and sociocultural theory in particular, emphasize the interactive relationship between the individual and environment, including people and surrounding contexts. In turn, the importance of interaction enhances the need of communicative competence, which is the ultimate goal of current foreign language teaching and learning. To promote communicative competence of college EFL students in Taiwan, a more culturally responsive EFL curriculum is advocated, in which differentiated instruction can play an important role as it recognizes the individual uniqueness that is culturally influenced. While traditional testing culture is curtailing teaching and learning of English in Taiwan, differentiated instruction provides an authentic assessment alternative of tiered performance tasks that lead to higher self-esteem, more effort, and finally higher achievement. Also linking to Confucian philosophy, differentiated instruction is especially potential of winning acceptance in a Chinese educational system.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Chapter Overview

In a discovery orientation, this study seeks to explore the applicability of one aspect of differentiated instruction in a college EFL context in Taiwan, specifically the influences of tiered performance tasks on college EFL learners—their perspectives on differentiated assessment in the form of tiered performance tasks, and how their attitudes toward English learning are affected by tiered performance tasks in an assessment setting.

This study is exploratory in nature. Just as Einstein said, "*If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?*" (Wikiquote, November 14, 2007). Under the broad term, qualitative inquiry, this case study aims to understand and interpret multiple, socially constructed realities (Glesne, 1999). Using the interpretivist (also referred to as constructivist) paradigm, qualitative researchers seek to portray and derive profound understanding of social realities that are constructed by the participants in those social settings through in-depth interaction with relevant people in one or several sites (Glesne, 1999). As the present research questions are open-ended and flexible and there is no previously set hypothesis to be tested, the research questions will be better answered and understood through describing, summarizing, interpreting, and integrating, rather than statistical measures (Weiss, 1994). Therefore, the multiple qualitative methods employed collectively derive an understanding of the research questions from the perspective of observed persons in their own milieu (Patton, 2002).

Research Questions

The guiding question of the study is: Is differentiated instruction applicable in college EFL classrooms in Taiwan? This question inquires about three aspects. First, how will the American-rooted instructional approach fit in the specific Chinese society in Taiwan? Although the well-respected Confucius had been teaching in a differentiating manner thousands of years ago, in general, the current educational practices in Taiwan have neglected the humanistic spirit of education. Second, will differentiated instruction be feasible at college level, since it is generally implemented at K-12 levels? Third, will differentiated instruction be appropriate in an EFL classroom? This question comes from research findings that differentiated instruction is scarcely applied in an EFL setting.

Under the broad inquiry, one specific aspect of an EFL curriculum is chosen for attentive exploration, which leads to two sub-questions regarding tiered performance tasks as a differentiated form of assessment:

1. What are college EFL students' perspectives on tiered performance tasks?
2. What are the implications of these perspectives to EFL learning and teaching?

Type of Study

Given the nature of the research questions, the research strategy of case study is chosen. Yin (1994) explains the rationale of using case studies, “[i]n general, case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posted, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (p. 1). Yin further points out that the case study inquiry “relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion...and benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis” (p.

13). In other words, the case study is an all-encompassing method with the logic of design incorporating specific approaches to data collection and to data analysis. In this sense, the case study is a comprehensive research strategy. Also regarding case study a strategy, Creswell (2003) describes it as a strategy in which “the researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals. The case(s) are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time” (p. 15). With the definitions above, I see the case study as a clearly appropriate strategy for the present study to explore college EFL students’ perspectives on tiered performance tasks in their classroom assessment situation during final examination period.

The Site and Participants

All facts as well as descriptions regarding the research site, CKW (a pseudonym), the relevant department, and the participants were results from observations, research, artifacts collection, conversations with AFL students, and consultation with university faculty members, staff, as well as webpage postings.

The Institution: CKW

CKW, an institution established in the 1960s, has developed from a small-scale local junior college into a modern university with a global outlook over the past 40 years. CKW is located in a historical town in central Taiwan. With a total enrollment slightly over 11,000, the university specializes in mechanical and civil engineering among the two master’s programs and 14 departments in 4 colleges. The emphasis on technology and virtue is clear in the university’s educational objective: to foster experts in technology who are well educated in theory, practice, and research. The well-maintained campus is decorated with exquisitely constructed scenes to

comfort both body and soul of students, faculty, and staff. Especially striking are the many huge rocks with engravings in Chinese and English indicating mottos such as “Dedicated, Competent, Professional” and “Spirited, Exceptional, Outstanding” as constant reminders to all passing by. With a vision of becoming an outstanding technological university that fully meets the governmental policy of open vocational higher education, CKW sets plans to develop itself into a multifaceted, internationalized, well-organized, and well-equipped technology university that can take up the challenges of the modern age.

CKW has been active in establishing academic alliances and cooperation with institutions across the globe. Over the years it has signed cooperation agreements with 17 universities in eight countries, for example, the U.S., the U.K., Japan, Russia, and China. Recent international collaborative efforts include cross-strait symposium on technical and vocational education in 2004, international symposium on digital learning in 2005, joining the Latin-American Alliance of Universities in 2005, and promoting student-exchange programs with partner colleges.

The Department: Applied Foreign Languages (AFL)

Participants in this study are 12 students in a freshmen class in the Department of Applied Foreign Languages (AFL). The Department of Applied Foreign Languages is a unique program created to meet the demands of business industries in Taiwan. Taiwan grounds its economic foundation on international trade; applied foreign languages are the foreign languages needed in the world of work in Taiwan to facilitate communication with companies overseas and to promote business. This background explains the weight that AFL places on students’ abilities in foreign languages, international trade, and computer skills. To cultivate competitive professionals in the job market, the AFL at CKW offers 4-year daytime undergraduate programs,

2-year evening and weekend programs at both junior college and undergraduate levels. Language courses offered include English, Japanese, and French. Because English is undoubtedly the dominant international language, English proficiency has been strongly emphasized in this department. AFL does not only aim to build up language abilities of its own students, but also undertakes the responsibility of providing English classes for the entire student body of CKW. Intensive class schedules keep the some thirty full-time faculty members busy and often require support from 20-30 adjuncts each semester to keep the programs running.

Aggressively working on maintaining its recently upgraded standing, CKW supports ongoing professional development of its faculty and staff. It encourages all sorts of academic activities, including advanced study, publication, research projects, and presentation as well as participation in domestic and international conferences, seminars, and workshops. Each faculty member is expected to take part in some form of professional development for at least 16 hours each year. Funds, grants, and project compensations are available to subsidize expenses occurred from participating domestic events or abroad. The AFL faculty members frequently travel around the island of Taiwan to attend conferences and workshops, with the International Symposium on English Teaching in November each year as a major occasion. In recent years, a growing number of AFL faculty members are actively extending their scholarly development and contact through conventions worldwide.

Seeing the importance of a multifaceted learning environment in language learning, the department of AFL is equipped with two professional language labs, two computer labs, one Little Theater, and two self-learning centers set with audiovisual materials for students' self-regulated learning. The students of the department are entitled to participate in a variety of activities such as English club, theatrical performances, English speech contests, writing contests,

karaoke singing contests, receptions, and parties; all aim to enrich the students' language experience.

The Curriculum: Training for Work and Survival

Differentiated from the traditional literature- and linguistic-based curriculum offered in many other universities, the curriculum of AFL in CKW provides two main areas of concentration: international business and teaching foreign languages to children. Based on the goals of the department, the curricula culture of Training for Work and Survival is an inherent theme in the instruction practice. As Green (2000) interprets, Training for Work and Survival implies "the most important goal of schooling is to promote the economic well-being of the country and its citizens" (p. 32), which is progressive in essence. However, because most instructors in the department are specialized in language teaching, linguistics, literature, or education, most often the instructional approaches adopted in the language classes is communicative. Communicative approach provides learners with opportunities to use authentic language when engaging in meaningful interaction among learners. Pair-work and group-work are commonly employed to sharpen students' language skills. Task-oriented activities are tailored to the needs of learners and arouse in them a willingness to participate for a variety of communicative purposes (Shumin, 1997). It is the firm belief of communicative English instructors that effective language learning takes place when some key conditions are met: (1) exposure to a comprehensible input of real language, (2) opportunities to use language in real and meaningful way, (3) intrinsic motivation to process the language exposed to and to use what is learned, (4) personal experience is engaged, and (5) individual differences are taken into account (Liao, 2007; Oxford, 2004; Pica 1997; Shumin, 1997). Reflecting on the theoretical assumptions differentiated instruction is based on, it is clear that communicative language

teaching, when bearing the characteristics of EFL learners in mind, is primarily in tune with the humanistic spirit that differentiated instruction is closely tied to.

The Participants

As Miles and Huberman (1994) point out, qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in-depth. Qualitative sampling tends to be *purposive*, rather than random, because it is often theory-driven. Since the target population is university EFL students in Taiwan, purposeful sampling method is used to recruit the participants. The potential number of participants was 48 with a target of 12-16 interviewees in a freshmen class with 10 males and 38 females. They are young adults over 18 years old, enrolled in the Department of Applied Foreign Languages at CKW.

The use of purposeful samples in case study is justified for its logic and power in “selecting *information-rich* cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research...” (Patton, 2002, p. 46). In order to obtain the information-rich cases, it is necessary to locate a differentiating classroom. However, the term differentiated instruction is fairly new to the field of EFL in Taiwan and the approach is time-consuming to implement; therefore, to my knowledge, there is practically no college instructor in Taiwan extensively committed to the approach. By chance, I identify through work connections with a particular class in which the instructor is interested in differentiated instruction and is in the initial phase of differentiating her classroom.

AFL Students in General

Rapid growth of the industrial and technology sectors of the economy laid foundation for a robust growth of the technological and vocational education system, which in turn has played

an important role in economic and industrial development in Taiwan over the past decades by providing adequately prepared workforce. Given the nature of this educational system, English and other foreign language skills are increasingly vital to its graduates in their future careers due to the speedy expansion of global contacts.

Brewed in the societal contexts and from economic needs, English education in Taiwan is fundamentally instrumental. English is generally considered a tool; it is used for the purposes of academic advancement, career development, and traveling abroad (Wu, 2006). In particular, students of technological and vocational system demonstrated a pragmatic view, addressing the need of English competences and the urgency of improving English education in the system (Hung, 1997).

Students in technically oriented higher education in Taiwan generally follow a common path, starting in junior high schools, passing through technical and vocational high schools, then entering an undergraduate program of interest looking to practical professional knowledge and skills for future careers. Existing literature indicated that starting in early years of this track, professional subjects have won significantly more attention from the institution, the teachers, and the students as well; English has been long neglected and the students are less motivated in learning English in general resulting in a gloomy proficiency (Wu, 2006).

Researchers have identified a host of factors inherent in the early stage of technical-track English education (as opposed to the more academic track in an English department), which lead to low English proficiency of students in the technological and vocational education system:

1. Disadvantaged learning environment including large classes, mixed-ability grouping, uneven competence of teachers, poor equipment, meager teaching facilities, and inadequate materials

2. Deprived learning opportunities including insufficient faculty, rundown class time, poor textbook designs, and deficient evaluation.
3. Impeding learner factors including passive learning attitudes, weak motivation, lack of interest, and lack of effective learning strategies (Lin, 1997; Wu, 2006).

It is indicated that students' English proficiency at each level of the vocational education system has a negative and direct impact on the students' achievement at the next level (Wu, 2006). Wu points out that within the EFL learning environment in Taiwan, it is not an easy task to master a foreign language in the areas of listening and speaking. On top of it is the practice of teaching to the test leaving students with weak listening and speaking skills. In contrast with progressive needs of English use in the globalization of the economy, English proficiency of students in technical and vocational education system seems to deteriorate increasingly, directing to an imminent crisis.

Given the nature of departments of AFL, English and other foreign language skills are increasingly vital to the graduates in their future careers due to the speedy expansion of global contacts. Compared with non-AFL majors, the English proficiency of AFL students is obviously better; however, it is far behind that of their counterparts in academic universities (Lin, 1997). In 2005, a survey was conducted on university students' performance in the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), a test of English proficiency used as a standard for establishing workplace English writing skills and spoken English proficiency for nonnative English speakers (Hsu, Liberty Times, July 5, 2005). The survey results showed that among a total of 862 student subjects from one national university and two technological universities, average score of AFL students was 492, leading that (397) of non-AFL students from the two participating technological universities, whereas business majors from the national university

averaged around 700. A TOEIC score of 300-500 is equivalent to the English proficiency of junior high school graduates; sadly, English proficiency of most AFL students does not meet industry expectation, which is a score of 525 in TOEIC, according to Hsu.

Participant Recruitment

Altogether 12 participants accepted the invitation to participate in the interviews. Participant selection was based on academic readiness levels and the instructor's recommendations. Information on students' academic performance was provided by the instructor.

Before any data collection began, the instructor introduced me to the class, and I distributed an invitation letter (Appendix D) to the class with verbal explanation about the study. A consent form (Appendix E) was also offered to obtain written permissions from the participants for observation, videotaping, possible interviews, and collection of documents/artifacts. When the final examination was approaching, I consulted with the instructor and asked her to recommend some students for individual as well as focus group interviews, based on academic level and gender distribution of the class.

The instructor provided contact numbers and email addresses of the suggested students so I was able to get in touch with the prospects individually. The instructor was not involved in the interview participant recruitment process and other forms of student records were not disclosed to me at this stage. I then contacted each individual prospect interviewee by phone or email. Verbal introduction to the study was given again to clarify any questions the student might have. With a consent from each of the selected participants, I arranged interviews on campus within a week after the final examination. I preferred to have one student from each of the three levels of instructor ranking: high, middle, and low would be invited for individual interviews. Due to

availability, two of the individual interviewees were female high achievers and one was of low-attaining male.

Like participants for individual interviews, focus groups were strategically targeted to represent key technological university student population in Taiwan. Again, I consulted the instructor for a suggested list based on demographics and student performance. Specifically, focus groups sought diverse representation of student academic levels, interests, leaning profiles, and gender. Following the same recruiting procedure with individual interviewees, I invited recommended students individually through phone calls or emails and arranged the group meetings accordingly. All four members in Focus Group 1 were females (one high/middle, one middle, and two low achievers), whereas there were five members in Focus Group 2: two females (one high and one middle achiever) as well as three males (one each ranked as high, middle, and low achiever). It is a common practice in AFL and many English programs in Taiwan that students are addressed by English names to enhance the feel of Western culture; therefore, English pseudonyms were used for the participants.

The Assessment

Task Descriptions

For the final examination under study, the instructor, Ms. Lin (pseudonym), designed the test in two parts, each worth 50 points: one part on listening comprehension as well as dictation and one part on speaking skills, which was the focus of the present research. In order to help students better understand the requirements, point distribution scheme, and scoring criteria, Ms. Lin prepared a handout (Appendix B) describing the examination and gave it to the class two weeks ahead of test days. The handout was written in English presenting an additional opportunity of exposure to the target language. In a course on English listening and speaking

abilities, chances to read and write English are purposefully created to complement comprehensive skill development. On the next day, Ms. Lin took time to explain the examination in detail and leave time for students to ask clarifying questions.

The listening section was a uniform test with questions at various levels. Although it was not included in this study, as a part of the final examination the listening section inevitably exerted influences on the students' perceptions about the whole test. The impact was quite noticeable as the listening test was obviously more difficult than it was in the mid-term examination. It contained more questions in a wider range of difficulty levels, and there were more types of questions causing test anxiety in many students. The participants usually commented on the listening part first when being asked about the final, if the question did not specify which part was intended. Several expressed it was quite demanding to answer many questions given a short period of time. In addition, the prerecorded dialogues were spoken fast, making the participants nervous. The instructor had emphasized that the key to prepare for this test was to get familiarized with the content in the textbook as well as the video recordings, not to memorize everything. Because what she valued was genuine understanding rather than fact recitation, the questions would be somewhat similar to what had been covered in class but not exactly the same. However, the students seemed to expect greater resemblance of test questions to the practices they had in class.

In the speaking part, students had to perform at least two required projects: "Souvenir" project and "Bad Habit" project. The third project was optional intending to provide the students an extra boost of scores, as long as they were willing to make additional efforts. Each project offered tasks at three levels: basic, intermediate, and advanced. Requirements for each level were given in the handout so students could consult it any time it was needed. All tasks were to be

performed in pairs, and the students were free to pick their partners. The basic-level task was performing an assigned conversation given in the textbook *World Link Book 1*, *World Link Video Course*, or an issue of the supplemental material *The ABC Interactive English*. The intermediate-level task required some modification of the conversation for basic-level task with a set of information or expressions from either the textbooks or the magazines. Advanced-level task involved incorporating another set of information or expressions into all the requirements for basic- and intermediate-level tasks. The students were free to decide on levels of tasks to perform in each project; however, the instructor reserved the final decision based on the actual quality of scripts developed by the students and assign scores accordingly.

The complexity level increased from basic to advanced level, so the point weights increased gradually from 40%, to 45%, up to 50% of the speaking part. In other words, each required task could be worth 20%, 22.5%, or 25% of the entire final examination grade of this course. The bonus project weighed differently; the three leveled tasks were worth 5%, 10%, or 20% respectively of the speaking part; that was 2.5%, 5%, or 10% of the final score.

These leveled tasks were designed with learner autonomy in mind, offering the students a chance to decide on their preferred score range. Any combination of two or three tasks could target a possible maximum score from 80 to 100 in the speaking test, depending on the chosen levels. The students could choose any task level that they were comfortable with and were not forced to take the same number of tasks or work toward a rigid uniform standard. Rather, they were expected to exercise decision-making for their own learning and evaluation, in which some creativity was expectant.

The purpose of the assessment in leveled tasks was to help the students shape a better understanding of their current abilities so as to engage themselves in suitable tasks, which would

be constructive rather than stressful for some and unchallenging for the others. As the purpose of classroom assessment is to inform and influence instruction (Tompkins, 2002), the instructor hoped to learn about her students, about herself as a teacher, and about the effect of the instruction. Similarly, she expected the students would learn about themselves as learners and also about their learning, when reflecting on their learning experience and developing self assessment.

Samples of the Tasks

Basic-level tasks only involved memorization of certain dialogues, while intermediate- and advanced-level tasks engaged the students with script construction, which may be minor changes and/or substitution of parts of speech, or a major modification of plot and characters. All performers had to pay attention to pronunciation, intonation, and tone of speech. The students were also encouraged to use props and wear appropriate costumes to craft a sense of the scenes they performed in. Samples of tasks of each level are attached in Appendix C.

The Assessment Site

To create a realistic feel of performance, the instructor moved the assessment scene to the Little Theater located on the third floor of the AFL Building. As contrasted with the participants' crowded homeroom on the first floor, this theater-like assembly hall provides generous spacing and an expectant atmosphere that the compactly adjacent rows of solid plastic combination chair-desks in a regular homeroom can not offer. With a capacity of nearly 120 seats, the theater is often reserved for special events such as speech or singing contests, conferences, or drama presentations. The audience seats, covered with red fabric, are comfortably lined on gradual tiers, allowing a clear view of the raised stage where performances are usually presented.

On the elevated platform, pair after pair of students was putting all their minds into their performances for the final examination. Once in a while, claps and laughter cracked from the audience when consummate or funny scenes were going on the stage. However, scattered in groups all over the seating area, with their textbook, sheets of dialogues, props, clothes, and drinks dispersed everywhere, the majority of the audience could not enjoy the shows or the luxury of simply being in this unusual occasion. They were either memorizing their own lines with a serious look or quietly rehearsing their coming up performances with partners. Perhaps the most attentive audience was the instructor.

Ethical considerations

In a case study the researcher is inevitably obtrusive; on site observation in the classroom invades the proceeding of class activities and sensitive information may be revealed (Creswell, 2003). As a way to protect participants' rights, some safeguards were employed:

- (1) The research objectives were made clear to the participants verbally and in writing.
(Appendix D)
- (2) Written permission to proceed with the study was obtained from the participants.
(Appendix E), and each participant received a confirmation of the interview either via telephone or a written note.
- (3) A research protocol form was filed with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and an approval was granted (Appendix A)
- (4) The participants were informed of all data collection devices and activities.
- (5) Verbatim transcription (see Appendix H for a sample) and partial written interpretations were made available to the relevant participants as member check.

- (6) Data in all forms were securely stored in a locked room. The identifying data were separated from de-identified data and were kept in a locked file cabinet only I had access to. Data will be stored for 5-10 years and then destroyed.
- (7) The participants' confidentiality was ensured and their rights, interests and wishes were considered when choices were made regarding reporting the data.
- (8) The reporting of data used pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants.

Data collection

Data Collection Strategies

This study employed multiple qualitative data collection methods: field observations, individual interviews, focus group discussions, videotaping, pictures, and artifacts including final examination rubric, task descriptions, scripts prepared by the participants, class pictures, and teaching materials as manifestations that describe participants' experiences in the final examination. After the interviews, e-mail messages were used to communicate with the participants for follow-up, clarification, and member checks. The email messages exchanged with participants were kept for analysis. All the data collection procedures were conducted in the site described above. Most important of all, only I had access to the uninterpreted data, and all analysis and reporting protected the identity of the participants using pseudonyms. Since the interviews and focus groups occurred after the final examination of the course, none of the students participating as informants could have their grades influenced by any streams of data.

Observation and *interviewing* have been ethnographic data collection methods commonly used in the anthropological tradition for illuminating patterns of culture through long-term immersion in the field. In educational fields the methods are often used to develop understanding (Glesne, 1999). Glesne points out that field observation provides the opportunity to "learn

firsthand how the actions of research participants correspond to their words, see patterns of behavior” (p. 43), and informs researchers about appropriate areas of investigation. Interview, according to Weiss (1994), gives us the access to the rich world of feelings and thoughts each participant provides, while Patton (2002) asserts the purpose of interviewing is to “enter into the other person’s perspective” (p. 341).

For thirty years, the *focus group interview* has been popular as a research technique in the marketing and business areas. Other fields such as education, health, communication, and psychology, have currently adopted its use for the “quick turnaround from implementation to findings” (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996, p. 2). It is also becoming widespread as an efficient way that offers opportunities for researchers to connect to their participants’ perceptions and interests through direct, intensive encounter to ascertain what the participants think and feel about specific phenomena and issues (Vaughn, et al., 1996). Many researchers (e.g. Glesne, 1999; Patton, 2002) claim that data gathered from field observation and interview lay the foundation for description and interpretation of what people say, do, and feel that provides insight of the true nature of the phenomenon being investigated, while focus group interview help delve into the multiple realities, experiences, and views of a group of key stakeholders, thus serves both comparative and representative purposes in relatively little time (Vaughn, et al., 1996).

According to Glesne (1999), various types of *artifacts* corroborate the observations and interviews and thus make findings more trustworthy. Beyond that, they may raise questions about the researcher’s guesses and thereby shape new directions for observations and interviews. They may also provide information unavailable elsewhere. Besides documents in written form, artifacts such as audiovisual materials add historical and contextual dimensions to observations

and interviews. In Glesne's words, "they enrich what you see and hear by supporting, expanding, and challenging your portrayals and perceptions" (p. 59). Artifacts accessible at a time convenient to the research can be unobtrusive sources of information (Creswell, 2003).

In various ways, *videotaping* and *photography* enhance observation. The primary advantages of videotaping are density and permanence, as Glesne (1999) puts it. She elaborates the remark by stating that the density of data collected with videotaping is greater than that of human observation or audio recording, and the nature of the record is permanent in that it is possible to return to the observation repeatedly. Photography is another form of observation that gathers specific contextual information for later analysis. Qualitative researchers need to remain open to creative ways to enhance data collection; this is especially true when it comes to videotaping and photography as Glesne suggests that the utility of photographs and videotapes is limited only by the researcher's imagination. While various forms of audiovisual materials enrich data collection, the researcher needs to make good ethical decisions concerning security and confidentiality of the identifying data. Creswell (2003) advises that once analyzed, the data need to be kept securely for a reasonable period of time, for example, 5-10 years, and then destroyed.

Instruments

The Researcher

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher serves as the instrument. Although limitations exist and rigor of study may be sacrificed to some extent, Guba and Lincoln (1981) argue that "this loss in rigor is more than offset by the flexibility, insight, and ability to build on tacit knowledge that is the peculiar province of the human instrument" (p. 113). In the present study, I collected

information through the procedures of observations, interviews, focus group discussions, and videotaping.

Observation Field Notes

During the observation, I adopted a mostly observing position. Following Glesne's (1999) advice and trying to be unobtrusive, I made an effort to observe everything that was happening. I jotted down field notes about the setting in words and in sketches. Pictures were also taken for more accurate description at a later time and for analysis of potential influences the environment might exert on the participants. I observed and described the participants in terms of their gender, gestures, how they dressed, what they did and said, and how and with whom they interacted. I also paid attention to the events as well as the acts that made up the events. The field notes included descriptive and analytic accounts, with the detailed description on the left column and the analytic thoughts on the corresponding right. Immediately after the observation, all the notes were typed up for future reference.

Interview Protocols

The observation discoveries directed revision and refinement of the interview questions. An interview protocol (see below and Appendix F) was developed based on observations and Patton's (2002) suggestions. Patton urges the interviewer to ask questions from a variety of angles; six areas of exploration are suggested: experience and behavior, opinion and values, feeling, knowledge, sensory, and background/demography. The interview protocol presented an agenda for exploration by starting with questions to probe the participants' feelings and experiences and then leading to their personal understanding and insight. As illustrated below, the interview protocol constitutes questions of different natures:

1. How do you describe yourself as a student in this department? (background)

2. Tell me what performance tasks you chose to do in the recent final examination for this class. (experience and behavior)
3. How did you make choices of the tasks for yourself? (experience and behavior)
4. How do you feel about the assessment? (feeling)
5. What part of the assessment do you like? What part of it don't you like?
(sensory/feeling)
6. What differences did you notice between the final examination and the other quizzes in this class? (experience and behavior/sensory)
7. What reasons did your teacher tell you why she is doing assessment in this way?
(knowledge/sensory)
8. How do you think the assessment should be conducted in a different way? (opinion and values)
9. How do the leveled performance tasks affect your learning in the class? (opinion and values)

While the interview guide supplied topics or subject areas within which exploration and probing of participants' experience were free to proceed, I, as an interviewer, made effort to follow Patton's reminder to ask truly open-ended questions so the participants could respond in their own words.

Moderator's guide

In addition to prepared interview questions, Vaughn, et al. (1996) advised that it is necessary to develop a moderator's guide to serve as a map to plan the course of the focus group interview. Eight sections were included in the moderator's guide: introduction, warm-up, clarification of terms, easy and non-threatening questions, more difficult questions, wrap-up,

member check, and closing statements. This guide helped the moderator facilitate honest and spontaneous responses on the topic. To reduce concerns and to protect confidentiality, the moderator emphasized, at the beginning and the end of focus groups, that the participants should not discuss what had happened in the focus group with others. In the present study, I took the role of moderator. The focus group moderator's guide (Appendix G) was developed after observations and individual interviews had proceeded.

Data Collection Procedures

Detailed information was collected through a variety of data collection procedures such as observation, interviews, and analysis of artifacts. During data collection, I filtered the information through a personal lens, interpreted the findings, raised questions, and constructed the participants' experiences as well as the attached meaning (Creswell, 2003; McMillan & Schumacher, 2005).

There were eight weekly field observations, twice a week, while the semester was in session. I recorded information using field notes with descriptive and analytic accounts, snapshots, and videotaping. By the end of the semester following the final examination week, I conducted three semi-structured face-to-face individual interviews plus two focus group interviews with selected students. Each individual interview took 40-50 minutes and each focus group lasted for 55-70 minutes.

Interviews were audio-taped and verbatim transcribed for reference (see Appendix H). In addition, artifacts such as requirements of final examination (see Appendix B), including scoring rubric and task descriptions, e-mails, textbook, and sample scripts created by students (Appendix C) were collected as manifestations that describe participants' experiences. The instructor was constantly consulted for more insight into and for verification of the students' responses to the

assessment. Names of the students who made comments of any nature during the interviews or focus groups were kept from the instructor's awareness.

Data Analysis

Experienced qualitative researchers find that due to the emergent nature of the naturalistic inquiry, distinction between data gathering and analysis is far less absolute in qualitative inquiry than in quantitative study (Patton, 2002). During data collection, possible themes and patterns emerge to inform subsequent fieldwork; therefore, Patton contends that "recording and tracking analytical insights that occur during data collection are part of fieldwork and the beginning of qualitative analysis" (p. 436). To capture the increasing new thoughts Vaughn et al. (1996) suggest researchers to initiate data analysis as soon as possible after the interview is conducted. Glesne (1999) describes sorting "fat data" (p. 132) into meaningful interpretation as a progressive process that generally involves coding, categorizing, and theme-searching.

In a similar vein, McMillan and Schumaner (2005) point out, qualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns (i.e., relationships) among the categories. This process may include interim analysis, coding and categorizing, and pattern seeking for plausible explanations. Through this inductive analysis, categories and patterns continue to emerge from the data; therefore, the researcher refines the organizing system of codes throughout the study. Accordingly, comparing and contrasting is used all the time.

Miles and Huberman (1994) describe data analysis as a three-step process consisting data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction involves selecting and condensing data collected over the course of the study. The researcher summarizes, codes, and breaks the data into themes and subthemes to see patterns. The reduced data are then

displayed in a visual form to show what the data imply. As with data reduction, data display is a part of analysis using many types of matrices, graphs, charts, and networks. In the third step of analyzing, the researcher interprets the data and draws meaning from the data. Miles and Huberman suggest the researcher hold the conclusions lightly, maintaining openness and skepticism. Final conclusions may not appear until they are verified.

Data reduction is an important part of analysis that sorts, focuses, and organizes data so conclusions can be drawn and verified (Miles & Huberman, 1994), because qualitative research is done chiefly with words, which are *fat* in the sense that they usually render multiple meanings, and therefore, may be unwieldy. During the data reduction/transforming process, I constantly thought of the research questions regarding differentiated instruction and tiered performance tasks (see p. 106), remembering Miles and Huberman have argued that conceptual framework and research questions are the best defense against overload. As a way to differentiate and combine the data as well as the reflections about the information gathered, I used inductive multiple coding with both descriptive and inferential codes to organize significant chunks of data. The practice of multiple-coding segments is useful in exploratory studies, Miles and Huberman maintain, because descriptive and inferential codes are two necessary levels of analysis. Generating the inductive codes after initial data were collected allowed a list of categories or labels grow gradually and it kept me more open-minded and more context-sensitive.

Recurrent themes emerged in the analytical process of answering the two sub-questions with regard to the participants' perspectives on tiered performance tasks and what the perspectives imply to EFL learning and teaching. These themes repeatedly come into view while I was sorting, comparing and combining participant responses back and forth. At some points, conflicting categories surfaced causing tensions in interpretation. These contradictory ideas

received welcoming attention as a way to verify conclusions rather than rivals that grounded disagreement (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Miles and Huberman suggest that the ultimate goal is to match the findings to a theory or set of constructs, which is differentiated instruction in this study.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of the study was ensured by the practice of triangulation that was, the use of multiple methods or the incorporation of multiple kinds of data sources. As Glesne (1999) indicates, the use of multiple data-collection methods contributes to the trustworthiness of the data, because “the more sources tapped for understanding, the richer the data and the more believable the findings” (p.31). Patton (2002) is of the same opinion that a combination of multiple sources of information enables the researcher to validate and cross-checking findings. Besides various ways of data collection, member checking improves trustworthiness for the individual as well as focus group interviews. Inclusive composition of the participants also increases confidence in research findings.

In a succinct fashion, to enhance trustworthiness of the study several strategies were employed:

1. Triangulation of data: Data were collected through multiple sources, which included observations, interviews, audio- as well as videotaping, plus artifact collection and analysis.
2. Member checks: Participants were asked to check the transcripts and analytical interpretations developed by me, to perform the most important credibility check (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

3. Repeated observations at the research site: I frequently spent an adequate amount of time in the field to explore multiple contextual factors and perspectives of participants for quality of information.
4. Clarification of researcher bias: My subjectivity and bias were revealed at the outset of the study when discussing the researcher's role.
5. Thick description: Detailed description of all information will be provided.
6. Cross-case analysis: Each set of observation, interview and focus group data was first treated as a comprehensive case in and of itself. Then, cross-case analysis began to build concepts across cases. This helps improve generalizability and deepen understanding and explanation through examination of similarities and differences (Merriam, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Reporting the Findings

The results were presented in richly descriptive, narrative form. Hopefully, this study has revealed a corner of the picture of how differentiated instruction works in a college EFL classroom in Taiwan, through the initial differentiation in assessment aspect of instruction. The focus of findings was the students' perspectives on tiered performance tasks and the implications of these perspectives. It was expected that more studies will be inspired by the experiences and perspectives gained from this case study. Thus, knowledge about practice of differentiated instruction in the EFL context in Taiwan will be accumulated to render beneficial insight for educators.

Chapter Summary

This chapter contains a description of the methodology used for the study. This study was a case study with 12 EFL students in Taiwan regarding their experience in and perspectives on

tiered performance tasks. Detailed descriptions were provided to enhance understanding of the site (the institution and the department), the target population, the assessment, and the tasks offered in the final examination. The data were collected through observations, interviews, videotaping, and artifact collection. Data analysis procedures followed a three-step process: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Also included are detailed descriptions of the site (the institution and the department), the target population, the assessment, and the tasks offered in the final examination to enhance understanding of the study. Other components included in this chapter are ethical considerations, trustworthiness, and how the findings were reported.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This study employed various data collection techniques to explore an assessment strategy in differentiated instruction. This assessment used tiered performance tasks in an EFL classroom in Taiwan. The entire data bank includes field notes from eight on-site observations, transcripts from three individual interviews as well as two focus groups, video taping, photographs, and artifact collection. The purpose of this chapter is to present findings mainly derived from the individual and group interviews, after constant rearrangement, comparison, and consultation with raw data of different sources.

Since it is unlikely to observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions, individual and focus group interviews serve as informative opportunities to probe into the meaningful worlds of the participants (Glesne, 1999). This study adopted a blend of informal conversational strategies and interview guides to seek an understanding of participants' perspectives on tiered performance tasks. Considering that the student participants were aware of my "having some kind of relationship" with the department and the instructor, I started the interviews in a conversational manner to ease any tensions the participants might have sensed from being in a traditionally inferior position to me, a friend of their teacher and also an instructor in the department. The informal conversational method carries strengths in offering flexibility, spontaneity, and responsiveness to individual differences and situational changes (Patton, 2002), which are particularly in line with the principles of differentiated instruction. I prepared an interview guide to ensure the same basic topics were explored in each interview. A guide helps keep the interactions focused in interviews while a conversational style is established to allow individual perspectives to emerge, according to Patton.

There were nine interview questions designed to provide a framework within which the participants could express, in their own words, their experiences and understandings. To reach this aim, Patton (2002) suggests qualitative researchers ask open-ended, neutral, singular, and clear questions. With the individual interviewees, it is necessary to start with a background question asking for descriptive information about each interviewee's learning experience at the time of the interview to make sense of the responses. This background question applies to the three individual interviewees only, because it does not seem appropriate in a focus group situation. The rest of the interviews began with non-controversial questions about behavior, activities, and experiences, followed with questions regarding feelings, opinions and values. Many of the interview questions are interrelated and one leads to the next. As a result, responses to some questions may apply to others and naturally serve as follow-up for further clarification as well as verification to each other. The interviews were conducted mostly in Chinese so the participants would be able to express themselves freely and fully. Once in a while, the participants used a few terms in English that they were familiar with; mixing use of Chinese with some English has become common among English learners in Taiwan.

To present findings, text descriptions were developed in order of interview questions, as main avenues to an overview of the interview responses. Typical to Chinese youths, most of the participants spoke in brief statements, especially in group situation with an authority figure present. Selected direct quotes of participants' expressions were therefore incorporated into the texts to facilitate a smooth flow of the findings, while providing an "emic perspective" (Patton, 2002, p. 303) through the insiders' voices. For responses to each interview question, except for question one, I created a corresponding table of succinct summaries to complement the text descriptions.

Responses to interview questions

1. How do you describe yourself as a student in this department?

To fully comprehend the responses to this question may require taking cultural factors into consideration. Most Chinese tend to be reserved when discussing their own merits and tend to stress their defects. Besides, personality plays a role in a person's self-portrait. Therefore, multiple sources of information contribute to a more complete picture of the participants. Combining participants' direct self-descriptions, indirect self-references throughout the interviews and my observations, a sketch of each of the three participants in individual interviews is presented below.

Lily

Lily was the head officer of the class at the time of the interview. She appeared to be outspoken and frank. It was surprising to learn that she used to be shy and unsure of herself. She explained that she had transformed into an active, confident young woman in the past two years, mainly because of her life experience as a community college student in Seattle for over a year, before she enrolled in CKW. Encouraged by her mother, she expected herself to be "native like" in English language. Lily recalled,

之前我學習英文的經驗不好，我學得很痛苦。因為我要先在腦中想好每個單字，再把他們套進一個句子中轉成英文說出來，這樣太吃力了。後來有人教，才慢慢學會用英文，而不是用中文思考。

[In the past, I had an unpleasant experience learning English; it was painful for me. Before uttering an English sentence, I had to think of every word I wanted to say, filled them into a certain sentence pattern, and then said it. That was too hard. Later, I gradually learned to think in English, not Chinese.]

Having passed the distasteful stage, Lily felt that “learning English is a pleasure now.” In particular, she enjoyed interactive dialogues with rich content. Willing to take risks and welcoming challenges, she learned English in whatever way she could find in daily life, such as watching TV and western movies, listening to ICRT, the English radio station in Taiwan, and interacting with foreigners when there was a chance. In class, she was always attentive to lectures, participating in listening and oral practice activities. She described herself as “unsatisfied with being second-rate”; she always pushed herself to surpass others.

Jo

Assisting the instructor to organize the final project presentations, Jo functioned as a mediator between the instructor and the class. Her pleasant and gentle temperament facilitated the whole process of scheduling 96 required and 22 optional bonus tasks for a class of 48 students. Tackling the hassle and hustle of arranging presentations in an attempt to satisfy everyone’s preference required a natural enthusiasm and problem solving skills. She said of herself, “I don’t put things off; and I take the initiative to work things out.” With such characteristics of a good language learner, Jo was doing well in the class according to the instructor, although she depicted herself as doing okay out of modesty typical of Chinese. However, she recognized herself with learning potential, which I could easily see from her attitudes. Like most high achievers, Jo expected herself to keep improving at all times. She drove herself forward, because of the awareness: “What I know is definitely not enough; I will be frustrated if difficulty comes up. It is to my own advantage to learn as much as possible, so I can be better prepared for the future.” The tiered performance tasks designed for this final assessment were stimulating, she commented and then added, “If the tasks were not leveled, I would find ways to improve myself, like searching for supplemental readings.” To her, increasing scores, the visible evidences to students, serve as the indicators of progress.

Ken

Ken went to a vocational high school majoring in computer science, but then decided to switch to the Department of Applied Foreign Languages (AFL) for college study because he believed English competency was a must in his future career. For him, the English-irrelevant background was a disadvantage to his current study. He used to learn new English words through memorization in high school, but realized the memory only lasted for a short time after examinations. Ken described his own English competencies,

…認識的單字不夠多，再來就是文法不夠好，造出來的句子很奇怪，有可能是中翻英這樣直接翻過來的。…我覺得最大的問題應該是聽力方面，聽力是最差的，其他應該是還可以，聽力就真的不行，…在聽的時候，聽到一個單字就好像聽到好幾個單字，因為有些單字唸起來都差不多，不知道聽到的是哪一個，意思是什麼。

[I don't know enough English words. Besides, my English grammar is not good enough. The sentences I make look weird, probably because they are directly translated into English from Chinese....I think my biggest problem is in listening. Listening is the worst; the rest is OK...When I'm listening to English, I often feel that I hear several words at the same time, because many words sound similar. I don't know which word I hear and what the word means.]

Having studying in AFL for almost one year, Ken came to the understanding that true communication ability rests on a command of the language in real-life situations. With an optimistic nature, Ken was adventurous in trying new tasks and testing his own level, despite the lack of a good grasp of English. He said, "I'd like to see how far I can go. If it is too difficult, I will back away and try later when I am better prepared."

Table 2

Task Choices and Scores

Participant	Task	Instructor Ranking	“Souvenir” Project			“Bad Habit” Project			Bonus Project			Total Score
			Adv.	Int.	Basic	Adv.	Int.	Basic	Adv.	Int.	Basic	
Ind-1	Lily	High		45			45		19			*109
Ind-2	Jo	High		45			43				5	93
Ind-3	Ken	Low	45					28				73
FG1	Cheryl	Hi./Mid.		43			43					86
	Jenny	Low		41			40			4		85
	Liz	Low		43			42					85
	Sandra	Middle			38			40			5	83
FG2	Alex	High	49			50						99
	Dick	Middle			38		41					79
	May	Middle		42			41					83
	Mike	Low			38			40			5	83
	Robin	High	49			50						99
Percentage of participants taking this task			3/12 (25%)	6/12 (50%)	3/12 (25%)	2/12 (17%)	7/12 (58%)	3/12 (25%)	1/12 (8%)	1/12 (8%)	3/12 (25%)	

Note. Adv. = advanced level. Int. = intermediate level. Ind. = individual interview. FG = focus group interview.

*Maximum points = 100.

2. Tell me what performance tasks you chose to do in the recent final examination for this class.

For each project, the participants had to choose an advanced-, intermediate-, or basic-level performance. In Table 2 below, an overall preference of advanced- and intermediate-level tasks is evident. Tendencies of task choices remained similar for the two required projects, namely the “Souvenir” and the “Bad Habit” projects; most participants (9 out of 12 for both projects) chose either advanced- or intermediate-level tasks. Yet for the optional bonus project, most participants (3 out of 5 that chose to perform) favored basic-level tasks. Therefore, the preference of tasks reversed depending on if the project was required or voluntary.

Among the three levels of task, intermediate level was generally preferred by the participants, especially for the two required projects on “Souvenir” and “Bad Habit”. For the “Souvenir” project, three did advanced-level tasks, six did intermediate-level tasks, and three did basic-level tasks. For the “Bad Habit” project, two did advanced-level tasks, seven did intermediate-level tasks, and three did basic-level tasks. But, the scenario was different for the bonus project; there were one participant who did an advanced-level task, one did an intermediate-level task, and three did basic-level tasks.

3. How did you make choices of the tasks for yourself?

In general, the participants decided on tasks taking four factors into consideration: complexity, time, partner, and score (See Table 3). Complexity level was their first concern, because it governed the participants’ other worries. Complexity level affected the amount of time required to complete the task, the form of task, and collaboration between

Table 3

Factors/Concerns of Task Choice

Factor/Concern	Participant
Challenge level (manageability)	Alex, Cheryl, Dick, Jenny, Jo, Ken, Lily, Liz, Mike
Preference for self-constructed scripts	Cheryl, Lily, Liz
Time	Alex, Jo, Ken, Liz, Sandra
Preparing other tests	Dick, Jo, Sandra
Collaboration between partners	All 12 participants
Score	Alex, Dick, Jenny, Ken, Mike, Sandra

partners. All these factors eventually related to the discernible result of their effort, also their utmost concern, the score.

Among the three levels of task to choose from, basic level was regarded as non-challenging on one hand, and comparatively difficult to do on the other hand, because it involved memorizing conversations provided in the textbook. Lily and Jenny felt it did not contain a nut to crack as the dialogue was ready for use. However, because the conversation was written by somebody else, other participants like Cheryl and Liz thought it was not as easy to handle as memorizing a script they constructed themselves.

The majority of participants, for instance, Cheryl, Jo, and Liz expressed desire for challenges, but backed off for the skill and time advanced-level tasks required. Therefore, intermediate-level tasks appeared to be the best choices for most of them, and were actually the most performed tasks (see Table 2). As Lily confirmed my verification on advantages of the intermediate-level tasks, “There is a basic structure to follow, and you can still be creative adding your own ideals to it, and it’s not too demanding.” This explains why Cheryl commented on intermediate-level tasks as presenting “appropriate degree of challenge that seems manageable.” Dick and Mike also agreed that it is better to choose something one can manage and then work hard for a good presentation; otherwise, “it will be embarrassing putting out an unsuccessful show and get a poor score,” they said.

Several participants felt time was pressing as they had to deal with many other tests besides the final presentation for this class of Freshmen English Listening and Speaking Practices. In order to juggle the many balls in hand, they had to plan tactically. Sandra shared her strategy of choosing tasks,

我三個都選基本的，因為接近段考，時間滿急的，所以基本的雖然分數比較低，但如果三個都做的話，成績也還在自己可以接受的範圍。基本的比較容易，所以我可以省下時間準備其他考試。

[I did three basic-level tasks because we had only limited time to prepare for the finals. Although the points for basic-level tasks are lower than the others, I can still target an acceptable score by doing three projects. It's easier to do basic-level ones, so I could save time for the other tests.]

On the same note, Jo had stated that she performed intermediate- and basic-level tasks due to time factor; should time allow she would have chosen advanced-level projects and would be able to present more enriched content. But, Alex, who performed two advanced-level tasks, felt that he had sufficient time to prepare.

Collaboration between partners was another consideration. All participants said they discussed again and again with their partners to reach an agreement on what to perform. Often, they compromised on complexity level to sustain teamwork. Lily did two intermediate-level tasks to ease her partner's (Cheryl's) anxiety although she preferred advanced-level tasks. Alex and his partner (Ken) presented an interesting case. Alex, a high achiever in the instructor's ranking, worried about the amount of time he had to put in and Ken's ability to handle if they did an advanced-level task. However, Ken, a low achiever according to the instructor, was enthusiastic about taking the challenge that advanced-level tasks offered.

我們本來想選 advanced-level 的。我那個搭檔是很強的。他怕，而我則是滿想嘗試的，我就是想說：沒關係，嘗試啊，因為可以試試看難到什麼程度。我那個同學最後就說不要，還是做 Intermediate 的，我也覺得 okay。…他怕做 advanced-level task 會花滿多時間在上面的，因為你要思考的就更多了。

他是顧慮時間跟難度，怕很難完成。就怕內容不夠符合老師要求的水準，分數不高。

[Originally, we wanted to choose an advanced-level task. My partner is very good at English. He was worried, while I wanted to give it a try. I thought: It's all right. Just try, because we can see how hard it's going to be. But he finally said no, we ended up with an intermediate-level project. I think that's okay, too....He worried that it would take much time to do an advanced-level task, because you have to give it a really good thought to do it well. He was concerned about time and the difficulty level; it would be very hard to complete the task as required. If our script did not meet the teacher's expectations, we would not get a good mark.]

Alex and Ken eventually performed an advanced-level task, which Ken mistook for an intermediate-level task; Ken thought that he gave in to Alex while Alex in fact complied with Ken's wish.

Unlike most participants who worked with their usual partners in other presentations, Liz had a new partner this time. She found it a rewarding experience because the change led to more effort on her part than before and therefore brought up a sense of achievement. At the same time, her new partner made a breakthrough in interpersonal relationship. Liz felt fulfilled both academically and spiritually.

Score is always a great concern for students and the participants in this study were no exception. They aimed at the best possible scores that they desired when deciding what tasks to perform. Higher possible scores were the incentives for Alex to undertake advanced-level tasks. Jenny did all three projects to make a total of 100 points possible. Likewise, Mike was especially pleased with the optional bonus project, which offered him a chance to boost his score.

Reflecting on his negotiation with Alex, Ken said it is important to make sure one can manage what he/she is to perform, especially so the presentation will meet the instructor's expectations; after all, it is the instructor who gives the marks.

4. How do you feel about the assessment?

For all participants, this assessment was undoubtedly innovative. Its unconventional format drew from the participants a chain of reactions mixed with negative and positive impressions, which are shown in Table 4. Dick described his first response to the announcement of the test design as “a big question mark,” whereas Cheryl cried out, “It’s so hard, so complicated!” Indeed, it seemed the format was too complex to understand at the initial contact for most, and some were still confused even after the final examination was over. Part of the confusion might have come from the all-in-English task descriptions and requirements, which seemed beyond grasp of most participants. The instructor was aware of the general bewilderment and had provided extra clarification.

May in Focus Group 2 gave an account of the perplexity: “In the beginning, we don’t understand the sheet that explains the three levels. We have never seen something like that, so we can’t understand it.” Ken was a good example illustrating the confusion. He took advanced-level tasks for intermediate-level ones and therefore was unable, in the individual interview, to describe what advanced-level tasks were like:

I：那個 Intermediate 的是要你們做些什麼？

K：就是我剛剛講的，要自己想對話，然後套入課本 [或是 *ABC Interactive English*] 裡的幾個句子，這些加起來要很有邏輯，不能偏離主題的。

Table 4

Participants' Feelings about the Assessment

Feeling	Participant
Positive	
Innovative, original, authentic	All 12 participants
Challenging, stimulating; bringing out potential	All 12 participants
Appropriate levels and point distribution	Jo, Ken, Mike
Better chances to improve skills	Dick, Jenny, Jo, Lily, Liz, Robin
Better stage; lower level of stage fright	Dick, Jenny, Ken, Lily, Liz
Offering choices that led to autonomy, a feeling of being attended/respected, and stress reduction	Alex, Cheryl, Dick, Jenny, Jo, Ken, Lily, Liz, May, Mike, Sandra
Willing to have same kind of assessment in the future	All 12 participants
Negative	
Complicated, shocking and confusing initially	All 12 participants
Time-consuming script writing	Alex, Cheryl, Jenny, Jo, Liz, Robin
Little attention from the audience	Cheryl, Dick, Jo, Lily, May
Higher level of stage fright	Alex, Cheryl, Jo, Mike
Hard to schedule and maintain performance order	Cheryl, Jenny, Jo, Liz, Sandra

I: 這是最難的還是 Intermediate? 我感覺起來好像挺難的耶!

K: 我忘記了, 但是比 Intermediate 還難一點點而已。

I: 所以你剛才講的那個是 Advanced?

K: 欸, 中等的。

I: 啊, 這樣子? 那 Advanced 的比 Intermediate 還難一點點?

K: 再難一點點。難在哪裡我忘記了, 就只是大概知道。

[I: What are you supposed to do for an intermediate task?

K: Just like what I said, you have to make a conversation, insert some sentences from the textbook [or *ABC Interactive English*] into the conversation and make the whole thing logical. You can't get off-topic.

I: Is this the advanced level or the intermediate? It sounds quite difficult.

K: I forgot. The advanced-level task is only a bit more difficult than the intermediate.

I: So, what you just described is an advanced-level task?

K: Uhhh, intermediate.

I: Wow! And the advanced-level task is harder than that?

K: A bit harder. But I forgot how. I only know vaguely.]

(I: the researcher/interviewer; K: Ken)

Besides confusion about the tiered tasks, performance on the stage of the Little Theater, rather than the crowded classroom, aroused opposing reactions among the participants. About half of them sensed increased nervousness, while the others felt more comfortable performing in a distance away from the audience, their peers and the instructor.

The listening comprehension test, a separate part of the final examination, added another layer of complication to this assessment in spite that it was not included in this study. In each

individual and group interview, the participants spent some time discussing how the listening test has changed in its scope and difficulty level. Most of them complained the test was demanding and added to their nervousness. Lily was the only exception; she was excited about having novel and challenging test questions. It seems somehow the listening test has impacted the participants' overall impression of the final examination.

Furthermore, the requirement of multiple presentations for one examination caused some management problems, as members in Focus Group 1 commented. Jo, who spoke of her experience in scheduling performances, mentioned it was a tough job to coordinate requests of 48 people. She also noticed a small part of students resistant to the dramatic change of test format, thus choosing basic-level tasks. But, she noted that “only a few want to pass by; most in the class accept the assessment nicely and welcome the challenges this assessment presented.”

Recognition of positive aspects of the assessment rose after the initial shock had quelled, and all participants agreed that they would like to have the same kind of assessment in the future. The participants realized the choices of tasks this examination offered actually meant to address their individual levels and greater autonomy. May in Focus Group 2 noted, “...after I know how it works, I think it is pretty cool, because we can estimate our scores.” Cheryl and Jenny in Focus Group 1 shared the same emotional transition—from feeling overwhelmed to being respected. They, joined by others like Mike, Ken, and Robin, acknowledged the power of control inherent in making their own choices. Cheryl and Jenny described their series of reactions to the assessment,

Cheryl：很難！很複雜！

Jenny：當開始準備以後就覺得還好，還可以接受。

Cheryl： 在思考以後，又覺得老師是給我們選擇機會，尊重我們。對於這部分我覺得蠻好的，有一種被尊重的感覺。

Jenny： 不會只侷限在一種題目，可以自己選擇。

[Cheryl: It's so hard, so complicated!

Jenny: It's okay after we started preparing for it; it's acceptable.

Cheryl: On second thought, I think Ms. Lin was actually giving us the chance to make choices. She respects us. I feel great about it, about being respected.

Jenny: We are not restricted with only one kind of question. We can make our own choices.]

There was an assortment of other positive comments. For Jo, the levels and point distributions were appropriate, and for Mike the option of bonus project was appealing. Performing in pairs increased workload and responsibility for Dick and Robin, as opposed to in small groups as in the Mid-term examination for another class, but it also brought chances to better their oral skills. Lily, always looking forward to challenges, felt it was nice that the assessment came in a new format. She was glad that creating personalized scripts provided her a stage to bring her skills into play. The most affirmative comment about the innovative assessment came from Ken. He stated, "There is probably no better way than this. It is really great!"

5. What part of the assessment do you like? What part of it don't you like?

This question validates responses to the last question regarding participants' feelings toward the new form of assessment. Answers of similar nature confirmed the consistency of

participant responses. As shown in Table 5, the participants reached the consensus that the best thing tiered performance tasks offered them were choices. Lily and May regarded having choices as self-government; they were satisfied with the chance to have their own say about what and how to perform the presentations. Lily spoke with a bright smile on her face during the individual interview,

老師有說過各部分佔多少比例，例如發音佔 20%、內容佔 40%。像內容的部分，我們考前要先寄 script 給她，她會先看對話和文法，給個分數，再看我們的發音評分。演得精不精采，也會給個分數。我覺得很不錯，因為老師已經給我們機會選擇了，我還挺滿意這個部分的。每個等級有每個等級的分數，老師有給我們看過，讓我們自己做決定，很民主啊！

[Ms. Lin had told us scoring criteria. For example, pronunciation weighed 20%, and content weighed 40%. For content, we had to email her the scripts and she would grade them based on the dialogue and grammar before the presentation. Then, she gave us scores based on the pronunciation and performance. I think it is really nice, because she gave us the choices. This is the part I am really pleased with. Each task is allowed a certain number of points. She has shown us the rubric. It's democratic that we can make our own decisions!]

Dick added that an assessment offering choices addresses fairness, for “it is unfair to expect everybody to meet the same requirement.” Sandra, Ken, and Mike shared the same view. They commented that choices take care of individual needs and academic readiness, thus lessen stress from the assessment. Additionally, choices motivated the participants to go a step further. For example, Robin and Dick assumed greater responsibility for their presentations and pushed themselves forward.

Table 5

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Assessment from Participants' Perspectives

Description	Viewed as Strength	Viewed as Weakness
Choices	All but Cheryl	Cheryl (specifically against unrestricted choices)
Tiered tasks	All but Cheryl, Dick, & Lily	Cheryl, Dick, & Lily (All three were concerned about basic-level tasks)
Bonus project	Jenny, Jo, Lily, Mike, Sandra	
Learning enhancement	Alex, Dick, Jenny, Jo, Ken, Lily, Liz, Mike, Robin	
Stage & location	Dick, Jenny, Ken, Lily, Liz	Alex, Cheryl, Jo, May, Mike
Preparation and process		Alex, Cheryl, Dick, Jo, Robin Sandra
Audience		Cheryl, Dick, Jo, Lily, May
Management		Cheryl, Jenny, Jo, Liz, Sandra

As all things come in multiple facets, choices did not always bring about positive results. “It’s time-consuming!” stated Jo about a negative side effect of choosing challenging tasks. Cheryl and Dick were particularly concerned because choices also allowed students to make less effort, if they were satisfied with merely passing by, rather than genuine learning, or wanted to strategically secure high scores without working hard. Dick commented,

有上進心的同學，當然會挑戰難度高一點的；另一種同學，只是想要通過而已，所以會選擇比較簡單的，反正就準備一下，照課本唸一唸就好。所以還是要看個人心態，有些人心態比較隨便，大概是想隨便唸一唸就好，有些人比較有動力去讀書，就會比較認真往難度高的挑戰。

[Diligent students will choose challenging tasks, but those who only want to pass will take the easier ones; they only need to recite the dialogues in the textbook. So, it depends on the learning attitude. Some people do not care about study; they will prepare for the examination perfunctorily, while some others are more motivated and will challenge themselves with tasks of higher level.]

In a follow-up email, Cheryl extended her argument:

我覺得如果每次的考試老師都要考慮每個同學之間的差異的話，這樣對那些程度好的或程度不好的同學都不公平，因為如果這次的考試老師出的題目是比較簡單的話，對於那些程度不是很好的同學的話，就沒有進步，相反的對那些程度好的同學就沒有挑戰力了，那如果老師給我們很多選擇的話，那就沒有強迫性了，因為考試最終的目的是成績的高低，這樣大家都會找自己覺得簡單的或是找具有一點點的挑戰性的試題去考試，這樣成績才會高呀！而這樣就不會有很大的進步，更甚的則是待在原地沒有進步。所以大家都該有些壓力才會進

步，有些壓力才能激發每個人的內在潛能，這樣才會有進步啊！這樣才能在逆境中成長。

[I think it's unfair for both high and low achievers if the teacher has to take individual differences into consideration in each test, because if the questions are easy, those low achievers will not make progress and it's not challenging for high achievers. If the teacher offers many choices, the test does not force us to work hard. As the final goal of test is to distinguish high from low scores, then everybody will choose easy or slightly challenging tasks to get a high score. This way, we will not make much progress and even worse, we will remain in the same place, not making any improvement. So, we all need some pressure to grow; pressure inspires our potential because adversity produces growth.]

Concerns regarding the possibility of choices being non-challenging evoked extended discussion about levels of task to be offered, which is further presented under question 8 on suggestions for future assessment.

According to the participants, down sides of the assessment that they just experienced include time-consuming process in terms of script preparation and long assessment procedures, busy audience paying little attention to performance being staged, complicated assessment format, management difficulty, short notice, and mixes comments on location. These off-putting situations constituted most of the participants' concerns while making task choices that have been discussed in question 3, and correspond by and large to the negative feelings mentioned in question 4.

6. What differences did you notice between the final examination and the other quizzes in this class?

The assessment under study was so different from the other tests the participants had before that all of them had no difficulty telling the changes. Apparently, the most noticeable change in this final assessment lay in the offering of tiered performance tasks for students to choose from. Included in the choices was an option of bonus projects. This new assessment was indeed complicated requiring much from the participants. Another obvious difference was the location of performance. The Mini Theatre located in the AFL Building, with a capacity of about 120 seats, was purposefully selected by the instructor to augment a more down-to-earth feeling of performing. The participants easily identified the changes and were seized with an impulse to utter their perceptions with comments due to the magnitude of impacts. The impacts ranged from negative, neutral to positive as illustrated in Table 6.

Time-consuming was the single aspect that most participants criticized about the tasks for the final examination. This was obvious considering that multiple task performances were required in this final examination, but not in the Mid-term. Although perceiving the same differences, the participants were impacted differently. Cheryl and Sandra especially viewed time-consuming as a disadvantage because they did not see overt improvement in English skills resulted from the innovation. Alex, Jo, Lily, and Robin all admitted that they worked hard to prepare for the presentations; Jo felt the extra time she put in did not result in a better score, whereas it was nothing special for the other three as they always do their best in every task. For Jenny and Liz, the tiered performance tasks, although time-consuming, urged them to attempt higher goals and felt the time was well spent.

Table 6

Perceived Differences between the Final Assessment and Other Tests

Perceived Difference	Participant
Changes of format	
Tiered performance tasks	All 12 participants
Choices of tasks (including optional bonus projects)	All 12 participants
More and complicated requirements	All 12 participants
New location with larger stage	All 12 participants
Positive outcomes of the changes	
Chances to try out new performance with self-constructed content	Alex, Cheryl, Dick, Jenny, Ken, Jo, Lily, Liz, Mike, Robin
Enhanced English abilities	Alex, Dick, Jenny, Jo, Ken, Lily, Liz, Mike, Robin
More commitment leading to progress	Dick, Jenny, Jo, Liz, Robin
Improved self-confidence	Dick, Jenny, Ken, Liz, Mike, Sandra
Lower level of stage fright and better performances	Dick, Jenny, Ken, Lily, Liz
Neutral effects of the changes	
Same effort level and mindset	Alex, Lily, Robin
Similar scores	Jo
No observed improvement in English skills	Cheryl, Sandra

Table 6 (continued).

Perceived Difference	Participant
Negative results of the changes	
Higher level of stage fright due to larger stage and video-taping	Alex, Cheryl, Jo, Mike
Unsatisfactory performance effect as a result of larger room	Cheryl, Dick, May
More time consuming (because of writing own scripts and preparing for at least two presentations)	Alex, Cheryl, Dick, Jenny, Jo, Liz, Robin, Sandra

Some participants perceived higher level of stage fright caused by the spacious Little Theater as opposed to their crowded homeroom. They also complained about unsatisfactory sound transmission because no microphone was used. May pointed out that her voice was soft, and she worried the instructor could not hear her to grade her adequately. Speaking from the audience's position, Cheryl and Dick said they could not hear the performers, often had a hard time understanding what was going on the stage, and therefore were not attracted by the performance. This clearly made a part of the reasons why the performers received little response from the audience. Dick also took the chance to stress that it is important for performers to speak loudly. With a different experience in the new location, Dick, Jenny, Ken, Lily, and Liz sensed lower level of stage fright than they did when performing in their homeroom; they appreciated the more realistic performance facility for better performances. Besides ample space for performance that the large stage provides, farther distance away from the audience makes them felt comparatively carefree.

It should be fair to say that on the whole the changes in assessment format were acknowledged. Most participants recognized benefits of tiered performance tasks in various ways. They saw the choices offered by tiered tasks as chances to stretch out from set patterns and test their own ability. One other common characteristic of their responses was tangible learning as a reward of effort. Liz and Jenny attributed their improvement to extra endeavor in constructing dialogues and preparing for the performances. Likewise, Robin and Dick referred to deep commitment as the root of skill development. An attached benefit of hard working and better attainment—enhanced self-confidence—pleased Liz, Dick, and Sandra. Dick had repeatedly made the point in various occasions that it all depends on the effort one puts into the work. He believed that nervousness comes from ill preparation; if well-prepared, one will learn from the

Table 7

Reasons for the Change of Assessment Format as Perceived by the Participants

Perceived Reasons	Participants
<p>“It seems to me that she did not explain why she was giving the test like that; maybe she did and I forgot. I did feel puzzled when I first heard the announcement. I think she wanted us to try a different way to see if we would work harder.” (Jo, Ind-2, p.3)</p>	Jo
<p>“She wants to know our levels....Perhaps in the past she only tested us at basic level; she wants to know our abilities better—maybe we have great potential—but she doesn’t know exactly, so she sets the three levels to find out.” (Robin, FG2, p.6)</p>	Ken, Robin
<p>“I think Ms. Lin did it considering that each student is at different level; the level range is pretty big in our class. So, she sets the three levels—basic, intermediate, and advanced— for us to choose from.” (Lily, Ind-1, p. 1)</p>	Lily, Ken, Mike
<p>“Probably she doesn’t want to limit us within the range she sets, so we can decide the way we want. Students’ feelings and opinions are considered.” (Sandra, FG1, p.5)</p>	May, Sandra
<p>“In the past, she just threw out something for us to respond to, but this time we have to make our own decisions.” (Robin, FG2, p.6)</p>	May, Robin

Table 7 (continued).

Perceived Reasons	Participant
<p>“Ms. Lin probably doesn’t want us to simply do as what she told us to—she shows us something and we do it the same way—she wishes that we will do it the way we like....to do what we want, to perform in our own way. Maybe it will bring out a better result.” (Dick, FG2, p. 6)</p>	Dick
<p>“This is a great idea...it helps the teacher to make decisions concerning the whole class, for example, subscription to English magazine, etc. She wants to see where we are, and then decide the level of magazine to subscribe.” (Ken, Ind-3, p. 5)</p>	Ken

experience. Alex and Mike agreed that when they spend enough time to practice, they perform well. There was a contented smile on Mike's face when mentioning this.

7. What reasons did your teacher tell you about why she is doing assessment in this way?

Maybe the change of test format was too drastically shocking, none of the participants recalled that the instructor explained her reasons for the unusual assessment. Obviously, the students were surprised at first and then so confused about the assessment format that no one paid attention to the rationale behind these changes. In the aftermath, Jo and Sandra were still curious what had caused the innovation, but most of the participants could only guess what the instructor's intention was. Many offered their suppositions as illustrated in Table 7. All in all, the participants believe the new design of assessment was guided by the instructor's intention of getting a better understanding of students' levels, of helping them achieve a better performance, of offering students more ownership, and of informing instructional decisions.

8. How do you think the assessment should be conducted in a different way?

An overall acceptance of the innovative assessment prevailed. As Ken said in a cheerful tone, "The tasks match each person's preferences, so it's not stressful....I think this test is a success." However, other participants were able to point out some directions for improvement. A succinct list of suggestions is provided in Table 8. Lily sounded pleased with the assessment in general, while indicating her wish for a change in assessment format. She suggested performing in small groups instead of pairs, because short plays in small groups are more interesting and more appealing to the audience. Thus, "the performance can serve a dual purpose of evaluation and entertainment. Hopefully the audience will be more responsive and it will be easier for the

instructor to give scores.” Her proposal was seconded by other participants in different interviews, such as Jo and most members in Focus Group 1, although they understood that it would be difficult or even impossible to differentiate levels in short-play performances. The participants preferred short plays in groups also because it enhances teamwork and strengthens sense of membership. As Jenny said, “I like short play; I enjoy how it feels when all working together.” Additionally, they were uncomfortable being the focus of attention when performing in pairs. Cheryl gave an analogue to describe her feeling: “I prefer short play; you don’t get ‘enlarged’ in it.”

Despite the general preference of short play in Focus Group 1 discussion, Sandra did not hesitate to support pair-work. Dick in Focus Group 2 showed the same inclination, although not clearly stated. He maintained that in a group performance each member can only play a small part of it, whereas undertaking more responsibility in pairs to prepare for the performances gives him a better chance to improve his skills. Further, he advocated for more performing opportunities throughout the semester so students can polish their skills constantly and get used to being on the stage. He stated,

如果老師可以隔一段時間就讓同學上去演的話，比如說一~二個禮拜練習一個話題當做家庭作業，這樣增加練習的機會，而不是等到期中或期末那麼長的時間才有機會上去演，那樣準備起來會有點壓力，如果說固定時間就上去演一次，等到期中期末考上台時，上台效果應該會很好。

[If we are allowed to stage a performance every once a while, for example, every other week we perform a certain topic as an assignment, then we get more opportunities to practice. The interval between examinations is too long and performing only once or twice for mid-term

Table 8

Suggestions for Future Assessments

Suggestion	Participant
Format	
Short plays in small groups	Cheryl, Jenny, Jo, Lily, Liz
More opportunities to perform throughout the semester	Dick
Choices aiming teacher preset goals	Cheryl, Jo
Levels	
Deletion of basic-level tasks	Lily, Dick
Tasks above current levels	Cheryl
More flexibility in creating own scripts	May, Robin
Use ready-made scripts for now and create own scripts when English ability improve	Alex
No need to change	Ken

and final examinations tends to be hectic. I believe with more practices, we will do a good job when it comes to examinations.]

Rather than asking for frequent practices, Cheryl indicated that she expected more guidance from the instructor as the conversation about choices extended in Focus Group 1. She emphasized that choices do not improve learning attitudes and enthusiasm; given choices students will not try to breakthrough, so no advancement will occur. Instead, if the instructor tells students directly what to do, “as students we cannot go up against the decision, so we will have to change ourselves to meet the teacher’s objectives.” After my verification prompt regarding a previous statement she had made about feeling great being given choices, she expressed it would be great if choices came with challenges slightly above the students’ current levels and aimed at learning goals preset by the instructor.

The levels of tasks caused some hot discussions as well. Both Lily and Dick were straightforward stating their opinions about basic-level tasks. They did not think these tasks benefit English learning. Common in their words, such tasks are “meaningless,” not pressing hard enough to elicit improvement, therefore could be deleted. Lily stated,

我覺得老師分兩個級數就好，不要 basic，basic 只是背課本，沒意義，同學也會比較認真的去思考。…只有中、高級，會強迫同學去思考如何[用英文]對話，不能因為懶得想，只做 basic 的。如果一年級就這樣練習，到了二、三、四年級，上外籍老師的課，聽得比較不吃力。

[I think the teacher only needs to offer two levels, not the basic one. Basic-level tasks require nothing more than memorizing dialogues in the textbook. It’s meaningless.

Without basic-level tasks, we will think more seriously....The intermediate- and advanced-level tasks will push us to think how to converse [in English]. We cannot

avoid the thinking by taking basic-level tasks. If we could practice doing it starting in freshmen year, it will be easier understanding native speaking English teachers when we get to sophomore, junior, and senior year.]

This view connects to Cheryl's reservation about choices. All the arguments concerning choices and levels seem to shed light on each other.

Persistently, against the other four group members' opinions, Dick argued that basic-level tasks were unnecessary because the instructor had demonstrated the dialogues and had had the class repeatedly practice the lines in role play. Presenting opposing views, Alex maintained that the basic-level tasks are needed to familiarize students with "authentic daily conversations in correct usages," which build up the students' repertoire so application in real-life situations is likely to occur. He spoke of the need out of his struggles in writing scripts for advanced-level tasks, "It will be better if we wait till our English reaches a certain level to create our own scripts." Robin, who also performed advanced-level tasks, vented the same difficulty in composing scripts: "it is very hard to incorporate sentences and phrases from *ABC Interactive English* into a conversation within 20 minutes." She said she had to consult many television shows for novelty ideas to come up with the scripts. To ease the commonly shared strain, May suggested more flexibility in preparing conversations for their performances. In her opinion, the instructor only needs to provide a topic for the dialogues, but not selected sentences and phrases.

9. How do the leveled performance tasks affect your leaning in the class?

Most participants found the tiered performance tasks offered in the assessment benefited their English learning in one way or another. Specifically, the most shared experience was elevated motivation. Yet, sensing strong willingness to engage in the performances, a few

participants distinguished themselves from others with different perceptions regarding advancement of English competencies, state of mind, or effort level (see Table 9).

Cheryl and Sandra, two willing students, denied beneficial gain from the ground-breaking assessment experience. Both of them had expressed that they worked diligently spending much time memorizing scripts. Cheryl was the vice head officer of the class with an above-average standing in the instructor's ranking. She had specifically indicated her desire for challenges a few times in Focus Group 1. In retrospect, she talked about her thought of the final examination,

我覺得還好，沒有很大幫助，因為只是背背稿，聽力也只花一點時間，所以，沒有提昇自己。唯一的差別是多準備一個題目、多花一點時間。

[The tiered tasks are okay. Not very helpful though, because all I did was reciting the scripts. Besides, I only spent a little time to prepare for the listening test. So, I do not see any improvement....The only difference was that I needed to work on two tasks, not just one, and spent more time to prepare.]

The more neutral reactions were not as commonplace as they sounded. These remarks were from Alex, Lily, and Robin, three high standing participants. They did not notice a difference in the way they prepared for the final examination from what they usually do, because they did their best in all assignments anyway. They perceived improvement in their English resulted from the ever-high level of effort. Lily said, in her typical open manner, that the tiered tasks gave her a chance to bring out and stretch her ability, but she did the same in terms of level of effort put into both mid-term and final examinations. In contrast, Alex and Robin gave an intriguing short answer at first: "As normal!" Then, Robin explained briefly and firmly: "I don't feel it as a test. It doesn't matter if it's tiered or not, I just do my best!"

Table 9

Influences of the Assessment on Participants' English Language Learning

Influence	Participant
Willing to engage more/stronger motivation	Cheryl, Dick, Ken, Jenny, Jo, Lily, Liz, Robin
Improving vocabulary and oral skills	Dick, Jenny, Ken, Jo, Lily, Liz, Robin
Developing deeper thinking and internalization of materials	Jo, Ken
Reflection on performance for ways to improve	Jo
Confidence on stage	Dick, Jenny, Jo, Liz, Sandra,
Following peer model	Dick
No perceived improvement	Cheryl, Sandra
No difference in effort level (always working hard)	Alex, Lily, Robin
Taking tests as usual assignments	Alex, Robin

These class leaders and officers, present or former, clearly demonstrated how they stay on top of tasks and achieve high. As Dick pointed out, “It’s obvious to see who are well-prepared. We all know that Robin and her partner practice their performance over and over again for each examination and I think, if they can do it, we can, too.” Putting out all they have for whatever task they are to undertake made the image of these high achievers and provided an exemplary model for peers to follow.

Positive comments from the participants mostly associate tiered performance tasks with how English abilities were benefited and how the participants strived for a good presentation. Generally, they indicated that their vocabulary increased because of composing new conversations, and oral skills improved with repeated practices. Willingness to commit more pushed several eager participants to make extra endeavors for the final examination. Jo took additional time to search for supplemental resources and think deeply about the materials. Besides, reflection on the performance afterwards served as a reference for her future improvement. She said,

看到同學沒專心看會有壓力，多少會有點失望吧。會想是因為自己演得不好嗎，想在下一次再做修正。考完之後，也會跟夥伴討論該改進的地方在哪裡。事後檢討才知道哪些有問題該改進，比如準備考試的方式，對學習比較有幫助。

[I felt stressed and somewhat disappointed when seeing the class was not paying attention to my performance. I wondered if it was because I did not do a good job, and would want to improve next time. After the examination, I discussed with my partner about how we could get better. Reflection helped us identify our weaknesses, such as the way we prepared for the examination; it benefited learning.]

Ken also mentioned that internalization was enhanced due to the format of the assessment. He had to reach an adequate understanding of the content to perform well; he could not just memorize his lines as a reflex like he did in high school.

While Cheryl and Sandra were sharing disappointment about no perceived learning from the tasks, Liz and Jenny spoke up to endorse for the new form of assessment. They both invested extra time to create scripts, which were time-consuming but rewarding at the same time. Also, as a result of constant practice, they became more confident on the stage. The enthusiasm underlies all the hard-working originated from a stronger motivation to do well in the performance, said the participants. Liz put it in a forthright fashion, “I wanted a better score.”

Chapter Summary

Glesne (1999) suggests that researchers think of interviewing as the process of getting words to fly in a human interaction with all of its attendant uncertainties. Words from the participants in the study flew in unpredictable directions and thus were overwhelming initially. Nevertheless, through copious revisiting, constant rearrangement, and candid reflection, some recurring key words emerged to suggest theme categories of the interview responses. The above findings were thus organized to reveal the story these participants co-constructed about their recent experience in a novel assessment. In the following chapter, further analysis of the findings was discussed by themes.

CHAPTER FIVE

EMERGING THEMES ON TIERED PERFORMANCE TASKS

In Chapter Four, I presented the participants' responses in order of interview questions. The responses were in the participants' own words to render truthfully their perceptions and reactions to the new format of assessment that they had just experienced in their final examination. Data presentation in Chapter Four was descriptive in nature, whereas in this chapter the discussion was analytical as salient themes emerging during the process. The intention was not to reiterate the full list of findings provided in Chapter Four in a different order. Rather, it was to follow the lead of significant participant responses to explore one layer further down into the core of the participants' experiences and generate inferences for a better understanding of the inquiry area.

Constant comparison is a valuable advice from Miles and Huberman (1994) as well as Merriam (2001) that led my set of analytic moves to arrive at category construction. The process consisted of multiple codings of field notes and interview transcripts, noting reflections or remarks in the margins, sorting and sifting through materials to identify patterns, themes, and distinct differences, elaborating a small set of generalizations that cover the consistencies discerned in the database, and finally confronting those generalizations with theoretical constructs. Because there were multiple interviews, observations, and video-taping, two stages of analysis were carried out—the within-case analysis and the cross-case analysis. As Merriam suggested for the within-case analysis, each set of interview and observation data was first treated as a comprehensive case in and of itself. When the analysis of each case was completed, cross-case analysis began in an effort to build concepts across cases.

Perspectives on Tiered Performance Tasks

At a surface level, direct responses provided by the participants, as presented in Chapter Four, could go under several headings: format (leveled tasks, challenging choices, self-determined score range), concerns (complexity level, time demands, partnership, score), influences (on English skills, motivation, and confidence), purposes (to provide better teaching and to assist learning), and suggestions (assessment implementation and tasks). The following section explores further into the categories and develops reflective themes as well as relationships among them to deliver a full picture of the participants' perspectives on tiered performance tasks. Themes thus derived include 1) choices as the roots of all possibilities, 2) self-determined score range as a manifestation of autonomy, 3) challenges as chances for breakthrough, 4) motivation and efforts as results of leveled tasks, 5) skills and confidence as natural flows from efforts, 6) concerns as warning of potential pitfalls, and 7) suggestions as inspiration of future improvement. All the themes link together as a result of the offering of choices and finally lead to an overall acknowledgement and acceptance of tiered performance tasks.

Choices as the Roots of All Possibilities

All over the rich data, choice surfaced as the leading theme that bonded other significant categories in the study. Choice was the fundamental feature of tiered performance tasks, in which all other themes embedded. A wide array of chances spring up

Having opportunities to make individual choices of different levels in a test is indeed an innovative idea for students in a society that has subscribed to uniform examination for generations. The participants in this study, growing up in a positivist culture, were greatly surprised by the new assessment format when their teacher made the announcement of tiered performance tasks. In shock, exclaimed Cheryl, "It's a gigantic change!" In excitement, Lily

recalled, “It is quite different...I have never taken a test like that. But I think it’s pretty cool...I like it when the teacher gives us something original.”

Surprising and refreshing, choice brought the participants a new sense as learners. All participants realized that choices endorsed tangible autonomy through manipulation to target a desired score range. Leveled tasks attended to individual differences offering possibilities of either challenges or reduced stress, depending on personal choices. Challenging tasks aroused a desire to try something new (such as Alex and Ken), whereas a task that the participants felt comfortable performing alleviated anxiety and possibly improved motivation (for example, Mike and Sandra). The choice of challenges entailed greater effort that led to improved English skills and higher confidence (for example, Jenny and Liz), if coupled with constructive type of work (like those who composed their own scripts). On the other hand, choosing an easy task with less stress might enlighten the participants that some changes in their learning were needed to help them reach a more satisfactory attainment (such as Cheryl and Sandra).

Choices opened up numerous doors for the participants and the routes each door led to were multiplied when personal factors came into play. In making task choices, each participant had his/her personal preference. However, when issues with respect to score, task complexity level and partnership were considered, the process of choice-making became complicated and full of variables. Lily welcomed challenges, and she preferred advanced-level tasks, but ended up with intermediated-level tasks because of her partner, Cheryl. Cheryl seemed to be unconfident in her learner efficacy, so she expected more guidance from the instructor in future choice offers. Jo appeared cautious, so she chose intermediate- and basic-level projects to make sure that she was able to manage the workloads while targeting a possible score of 100. Ken appeared eager to show what he could; as a result of negotiation with his partner, Alex, an

advanced-level task was performed, which was quite a challenge for Ken's academic level. Sandra also expressed that she would first consider her partner's personality to decide on tasks. Task choice appeared to be a showground displaying the participants' personality, learner identity, and peer interaction, which could all be diverse when different people were involved. A closer look at score issues follows in the next section, and further discussion on personal factors is presented in Chapter Six.

Self-determined Score Range as a Manifestation of Autonomy

Score was the underlying force that drove all the hard work the participants made. In fact, most participants expressed their care about the final scores to varying degrees. It seemed to the participants that the purpose of performing the tasks was to get a score, which was certainly the higher, the better. Cheryl in Focus Group 1 had made a statement that the final goal of test is to distinguish high from low scores (see p. 150), which clearly demonstrated the conventional view of a function testing fulfills: to determine grades (Tompkins, 2002). With social implications attached, such a viewpoint represents more than numbers in a student's report card; it implies standing in the class and closely associates with learner identity (Ecclestone & Pryor, 2003).

In the past it was the teacher's privilege to assign scores based on student performance. The practice placed the teacher in a superior position, and the students were trained to perform to the teacher's satisfaction for good marks. In this study the instructor shifted partial control of scoring to the participants' hands. Allowed choices of leveled tasks, the participants had their say about the score range they wanted to target. This pioneering feature was undoubtedly attractive and compensating when extra projects were required for this assessment under study and thus time became a vital issue in relation to the participants' overall performance in the

entire final examination period. Most participants mentioned they were pleased with the power over their scores and took advantage of the chance to manipulate.

Sandra and Jenny in Focus Group 1 were examples of how the participants decided what possible scores would satisfy them. Sandra developed her unique scoring strategy by making practical judgments. She said she wanted to save time to prepare for other tests so she chose three basic-level tasks; although these tasks were worth fewer points than tasks of other levels, she could still target an acceptable score by doing three projects. Jenny used a similar strategy to choose three intermediate-level tasks for a total of 100 points. To tackle the new yet demanding assessment, the participants developed their personal strategies that helped them achieve the best they desired.

The strategies seemed to work. Shown in Table 10, by and large the participants received a desired score that they projected. Worth noting is that three out of four low achievers had a score boost in the speaking part, although most end scores the participants earned in this final examination only reflected, but did not improve, the participant's position in instructor ranking. Scores for the speaking assessment for Jenny, Liz, and Mike jumped from a lower level to the middle, if scores from 91 to 100 were grouped as high, 81-90 as middle, and 80 or below as low. The score increase would be encouraging to participants with low self-esteem as most participants' expressed that scores mattered to them. At the time of interview the participants had not received their report card yet. However, these participants had realized that the tasks lent a hand to their growth in English ability. Black and Wiliam (2001) underlined the significance of enhancing low attainers' learning considering that "any 'tail' of low educational achievement is clearly a portent of wasted talent" (p. 3). This call for attention to any gains of low attaining

Table 10

Comparison of Scores

Participant		Mid-term	Final Exam	Final Exam	Targeted	Final exam.
		Total score	Listening	Speaking	Speaking	Total score
			Score	Score	Score	
Ind-1	Lily	94	95	109	110	100
Ind-2	Jo	89	78	93	95	86
Ind-3	Ken	73	50	73	90	62
FG1	Cheryl	84	85	86	90	88
	Jenny	86	64	85	100	75
	Liz	82	67	85	90	76
	Sandra	84	81	83	85	82
FG2	Alex	99	91	99	100	95
	Dick	81	78	79	85	79
	May	89	72	83	90	78
	Mike	62	48	83	85	66
	Robin	100	94	99	100	97

students manifests the belief that all students can learn and facilitates equal opportunity for diverse learners (Shepard, 2000).

A comparison of the targeted and actual scores illustrated that in most cases the participants received a score as desired; the difference between their goal and the actual score was within 5 points, reflecting possible instructor judgment. Noticeable discrepancy occurred in Ken's (17 points) and Jenny's grades (15 points). However, both of them expressed satisfaction with their gains in the assessment experience. It is possible that they would feel somewhat differently had they known the real scores. Fortunately, as a normal practice in CKW the students will not have access to their final examination grades, let alone the breakdown of marks, unless they ask the instructor specifically. The report cards they received would only show the final score in each class for the whole semester. Hopefully they would remain enthusiastic about English learning and this seems likely because they both have demonstrated positive attitudes stressing more on the true learning than scores.

As displayed in Table 10, most participants' scores in the final examination were lower than those in the mid-term examination, which might be discouraging to them after the endeavor. Also striking was that their scores in the speaking test were generally superior to those in the listening test. Apparently, their final examination scores were dragged down by the less impressive scores in the listening test. Because breakdown of their mid-term examination scores was not available, no close comparison of their marks in the speaking parts could be done to verify possible reasons of the differences between mid-term and final examination scores.

Yet, some analysis could still shed light on the fall of final examination scores. An eleven-point drop occurred in the scores for Jenny, Ken, and May. Two of them—Ken and Jenny—had a difference of larger than 20 points between their listening and speaking scores.

Meanwhile, inferring from the participants' general responses, the recent listening test appeared to be much more difficult than that in the mid-term; therefore, a sensible conjecture is that the difficulty level of the listening test in this final examination could possibly account for the drop of final examination scores.

On the whole, the chance to manipulate scores provided the participants a satisfying ownership in the evaluation of their learning. Scoring strategies helped most of the participants reach their desired scores. In addition, score jumps would be most likely for low achievers with the implementation of tiered performance tasks. Even if tangible growth in score could not happen immediately owing to some other factors involved, an important message was noted that the participants were satisfied with the hard work they had completed and true learning occurred during the preparation process. For those who made effort but did not experience positive effect of the assessment, further investigations are needed. Additional assistance with use of learning strategies may be helpful.

Challenges as Chances for Breakthrough

Due to the innovativeness tied to the choices and the possibility of reaching a preferred score range, a desire to take up new challenges was aroused in the participants. All the participants expressed more or less willingness to undertake challenges in the assessment. According to them, the new assessment is “challenging,” “motivating,” “stimulating,” and “promoting learning.” In Focus Group 2 both Alex and Mike remarked that the new assessment offered them chances to step out of fixed patterns and engage in new tasks for a try. Jenny and Liz in focus Group 1 noted that they gained something new and improved their English skills because of the tasks. Jenny stated,

因為跟以前不一樣，多少有些挑戰，比以前進步。…要花比較多心力、要花時間編稿、可以加入自己想要的東西；以前都採納別人的意見，因為是別人寫稿。

[Because it's different this time, it's somewhat more challenging and therefore brings about improvement...I had to work harder and spent more time on writing the scripts. I was able to put something I wanted into the script. In the past I used to take my partner's opinions because it was her that wrote the script.]

Following Jenny's line of statement, Liz said that she had a new mindset in this final examination and made progress,

我覺得這個考試讓自己更認真，因為是自己親自編稿。以前是我想中文稿，她改成英文稿，有時候她會改故事情節。還有，這次我也自己準備道具。…因為夥伴不一樣，這次比較好，我們一起寫稿，之後一起討論，採用比較好的版本。…因為原先的搭檔已經達到上限，而且，我也想讓這個新的搭檔有點突破。

[I feel that this assessment made me work more diligently, because I was the one that wrote the scripts. In the past I provided the plot in Chinese and my partner translated it into English. Sometimes she would modify the story. And I prepared props this time....I had a different partner; it worked out better. We worked on the scripts together and then we discussed to decide on a better version....because my original partner had made commitments with other people and I wanted to help the new one to break through her relationship with the class.]

Liz continued to explain what contributed to her sense of achievement in the last final examination, "I wanted to make the script more authentic, just like what happens in the real life

in western countries. Besides, I used to be timid about presenting myself, but this time I wanted a better score.” This desire to try something new and perform better inevitably caused additional stress and anxiety. However, time-consuming script composing, the most complained about aspect, was exactly where Jenny, Liz, and other participants found beneficial.

Novel assessment format of leveled tasks brought up a want of challenge and thus new responsibility, partnership and state of mind that made a breakthrough possible, not just for Liz’s new partner, but Liz as well.

Motivation and Efforts as Results of Leveled Tasks

Heightened motivation and greater efforts came as results from leveled tasks, which offered each participant a better fit in the assessment process. For decades, objective testing has dominated classroom practice giving standardized examinations to every student. It is a general belief of teachers that assessment must be *uniformly* administered to ensure fairness (Shepard, 2000, p. 5). Thus, students have been conditioned to taking the same test by applying facts learned routinely, no matter how different they can be. Conversely, tasks of different levels in this final examination showed the participants that each of them had the chance to put out his/her best performance anchored in what each could or was willing to manage.

Many participants had expressed that leveled tasks kindled their enthusiasm in learning. Nunley (2006) and Tomlinson (2001) provided an explanation for this description of tiered performance tasks. When making choices for one’s own learning, one is held accountable, and at the same time feels a kinship with, interest in, or passion for what is being learned and motivation is increased. Unintentionally, the participants in the present study confirmed the account; they sensed promoted willingness to engage in the tasks, even though the work was demanding and time-consuming.

Ken articulated his comment in the individual interview,

它的優點啊，就是有選擇性，再來是沒有壓力，還可以顧慮到每位同學的能力到哪裡，可以促進學習更加快速。考太難的，有壓力，就一定會退縮，對英文也會有一些恐懼，會有想要放棄的感覺，積極度也會受到影響，所以這是滿重要的。

[What is good about the assessment is that it gives us choices, and there is no pressure. It also takes everybody's ability level into consideration, so learning is promoted. If the test is too difficult causing too much pressure, we will withdraw, develop a fear of English and want to give it up. Our enthusiasm for English will also be affected. This is really important.]

Manageability of tasks apparently is a critical factor of engagement. Wigfield (1994) explained that expectancy of success in the given task significantly affects one's motivation in undertaking a task. When the participants perceived control over the task, their motivations were enhanced. To most of them, intermediate-level tasks presented "appropriate degree of challenge that seems manageable", and therefore were the most performed tasks. Like light at the end of a tunnel, self-chosen tasks with preferred level of challenge were goals within the participants' reach.

The opportunity of success seemed carrying especially great weight to participants of low-ranking. All low achieving participants in the study, Jenny, Ken, Liz, and Mike, demonstrated improved motivation to perform well. Gardner (1985) and Ngeow (1998) pointed out four aspects in motivated students: 1) a reason for learning, 2) a desire to attain the learning goal, 3) a positive attitude toward learning, and 4) effortful behavior. Motivated and effortful, the participants willingly engaged in the tiered performance tasks. This final examination

turned out to be a rewarding experience, presenting a case in contrast with that of students in test-oriented environments who learn English with low intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Chung, 2000).

Skill and Confidence as Natural Flows from Efforts

By and large, the participants found the tiered performance tasks beneficial to their English proficiency, with only a few exceptions. Most participants shared how their English skills improved, for example, Ken talked about the intermediate-level task that he did with Alex,

Basic-level tasks 是單純地用課本的對話，只要自己去背而已，感覺沒任何的挑戰性。而自己寫的就需要思考邏輯，順便可以讓你記你所寫的英文，再學習一些文法。因為你自己參與的東西一下子就記起來了，也比較好發揮。

[Basic-level tasks only required rote memorization of the dialogues in the textbook; they're not challenging. Whereas writing your own script involves careful thinking about the logic. It helps you remember what you write and learn additional English grammar rules, because it is easier to remember the stuff you are engaged in and show your ability.]

Jo, Lily, and Robin mentioned that they used resources beyond the textbooks to help them develop a good script, such as dictionary, online references, TV shows, and movies. Lily said,

這次考試對學習單字和口語都很有幫助，因為當我在編寫對話時，我需要單字的補助；但當我不知道如何念時，我便會去查字典來幫助，在這練習當中我會反覆的練習，這樣一來對我的單字和口語方面都很有幫助。

[This examination improved my vocabulary and oral skill. When I was writing scripts, I needed some new words to help me express myself. If I didn't know

how to pronounce the words, I will look them up in the dictionary and practice the pronunciation repeatedly. It was good for my vocabulary and oral performance.]

Similarly, Jo searched for additional references to enrich her scripts and she put extra thought into the writing, which aided learning. In Focus Group 1, both Jenny and Liz affirmed that the time spent on script construction was worthwhile.

In addition to gains in English ability, Jenny, Ken, Liz, and Mike noticed perked-up confidence. Ken said in an individual interview that he enjoyed a sense of achievement performing the higher-level task. Even though she did not find her skills improved, Sandra in Focus Group 1 expressed that she took much time to practice the conversations and became more confident in herself.

Concerns as Warnings of Potential Pitfalls

There were participants who made effort but did not reap gains in English skills. Cheryl and Sandra complained that they invested much time to prepare for the examination but did not seem to benefit from the effort. Perhaps out of disappointment, Cheryl voiced her reservation about choices and made a contradictory statement against the above motivation theory. As the narrative addresses several issues, it is repeated below for quick reference:

我覺得如果每次的考試老師都要考慮每個同學之間的差異的話，這樣對那些程度好的或程度不好的同學都不公平，因為如果這次的考試老師出的題目是比較簡單的話，對於那些程度不是很好的同學的話，就沒有進步，相反的對那些程度好的同學就沒有挑戰力了，那如果老師給我們很多選擇的話，那就沒有強迫性了，因為考試最終的目的是成績的高低，這樣大家都會找自己覺得簡單的或是找具有一點點的挑戰性的試題去考試，這樣成績才會高呀！而這樣就不會有很大的進步，只是慢慢的更甚則是待在原地沒有進步。所以大

家都該有些壓力才會進步，有些壓力才能激發每個人的內在潛能，這樣才會有進步啊！這樣才能在逆境中成長。

[I think it's unfair for both high and low achievers if the teacher has to take individual differences into consideration in each test, because if the questions are easy, those low achievers will not make progress and it's not challenging for high achievers. If the teacher offers many choices, the test does not force us to work hard. As the final goal of test is to distinguish high from low scores, then everybody will choose easy or slightly challenging tasks to get a high score. This way, we will not make much progress and even worse, we will remain in the same place, not making any improvement. So, we all need some pressure to grow; pressure inspires our potential because adversity produces growth.]

Vaughn et al. (1996) spelled out features of focus group interviews. The major assumption of focus group is that by fostering a range of opinions from a group of relevant participants, a more complete and revealing understanding of selected issues will be obtained. Therefore, focus group interview is designed to find out each participant's perspective and to encourage different points of view. The goal is to obtain opinions rather than to determine the exact strength of the opinions. With this goal in mind, the following discussion about Cheryl's statement is to seek the core of her thought, as contrast to views of the other participants, instead of making judgment. The intent is to achieve a more inclusive understanding of the participants' perspectives of tiered performance tasks.

First, Cheryl talked about consideration of individual differences. She was concerned that the teacher would favor the students with lower ability by giving easy questions, which would not be stimulating for low achievers and not challenging for the high, thus not fair for

either. At this point, she seemed to have uniform test in mind, but not leveled choices in the present study.

Then, Cheryl voiced worry about consequences of choice. Her fundamental concern was that with choices, students will not force themselves to try hard. The purpose of test is to determine grades. In order to make sure that they get a decent score, all students will choose an easy task or a slightly challenging one to avoid pressure; therefore, no learning is induced because they are not pressed to improve. This same perspective was stressed again in Focus Group 1 when she said, “given choices students will not try to breakthrough.” She seemed to imply that an assessment with choices treats students too nicely to stimulate progress.

An association of the statement with her complaint that her English skills were not improved offers grounds for some speculations about where she was coming from. It would be logical to think that Cheryl spoke out of her personal experience. Lack of perceived improvement made her wonder what caused her effort in vain. Because she took two intermediate-level tasks for the manageability and then found that she did not gain from the adequate exertion as she expected, she would suspect that the tasks she underwent did not push her hard enough to advance her English ability. So, she rationalized that pressure is needed to promote learning, applying a common Chinese expression to support her reasoning. The pressure, in her suspicion, might need to be greater than what she chose to commit. Perhaps she regretted or unconsciously felt ashamed about not taking advanced-level tasks in fear of the difficulty or commitment. To avoid admitting that she had taken the easier way out in the final examination, she put it as “everybody would do so to get a high score” to secretly include herself in the group, although she was well aware that some in the class did take the challenge of advanced-level task.

Score

Cheryl's argument about choice raised interesting issues to ponder in at least three dimensions: score, task level, and assessment type. First of all, she believed that offering choices might not be fair in terms of score. She pointed out that students tend to be easy on themselves and go for effortless tasks to avoid sweat, but still can get good scores. The viewpoint corresponds to what Black and Wiliam (2001) described about classroom culture in which the focus is on rewards, grades/scores, or place-in-the-class ranking. Students cultivated in such classroom culture look for ways to obtain the best marks rather than at the needs of their learning. With such a view, students are pleased with getting good scores, rather than genuine personal improvement. If so, students may be greatly concerned if they choose to take the challenges and beat their brains but do not necessarily get good scores. However, this seemed to be opposed to what many other participants perceived in their final examination experience as discussed above—those participants expressed sense of achievement and boosted confidence derived from the process of making efforts instead of scores, the result of efforts, while their grades for the final examination were still not disclosed.

Furthermore, one consequence of the classroom culture beset with problematic practice of assessment is that where the students have any choice, they avoid difficult tasks. Cheryl was correct about this general classroom culture in Taiwan, which is unfortunate and exactly one of the reasons for the present study. Yet, she might have been too pessimistic ignoring the fact that there were quite some of her peers who undertook the challenge of advanced-level tasks and she did not try to pass up the strenuous work by taking basic-level tasks herself.

As a matter of fact, choices were agreed on as the best thing offered in this assessment. Lily was especially pleased with the choices and the clear scoring criteria listed in the rubric.

She thought it was “democratic” giving all students chances to make decisions. Dick, Ken, Mike, and Sandra all commented that choices address fairness; otherwise as Dick put it, “it is unfair to expect everybody to meet the same requirement.” Choices took care of individual needs and differences in academic readiness, thus the assessment became less stressful.

Task Level

Another issue that Cheryl raised connected to Lily and Dick’s suggestion of canceling basic-level tasks. Dick and Lily considered basic-level tasks not challenging therefore it was meaningless to offer, while Cheryl contended that choices entail insufficient pressure that might give low achievers chance to avoid working hard and also failed to challenge high achievers. Although they voiced ideas in different terms, it would be reasonable to believe that by “pressure” Cheryl probably meant “challenge”; all three based their arguments on challenge level and were in line with Cheryl’s call for pressure/challenge to help students grow. While Cheryl’s expression “adversity produces growth” rang a bell, another proverb surfaced: “No pain; no gain” and it somewhat suggested that Cheryl may be more of a believer of the old ideas that real educational values rest on the overcoming of distasteful straining difficulties, which Rousseau (Graves, 1971) tried to undo.

It appeared that Cheryl was fluctuating between different levels of challenge needed to facilitate learning. While explaining her choices of tasks, she expressed that some “appropriate degree of challenge” was good and manageable; therefore she undertook two intermediate-level tasks. When discussing downsides of choices, she doubted that slightly challenging task were not sufficiently powerful to induce learning. It was possible that her self-contradictory statements stemmed from the puzzlement about the fact that the reasonable degree of challenge, as she believed in, did not produce the expected learning. As it is generally acknowledged that

challenge contributes to attainment, the questions are: Does it have to reach a certain degree of challenge to bring about learning? If so, what is the degree of challenge needed? Is there a universal criteria applying to every learner? Or, is it dependent on individual? In addition to challenge, what else might have come into play?

Assessment Type

The third issue, assessment type, relates to the last issue of challenge level. It was perplexing that both Cheryl and Sandra worked diligently for the final examination, but did not sense improvement in their English skills. Unless the motivation theory mentioned above only accounts for learner's state of mind (motivated) and behavior (effortful), but does not guarantee positive result, it should be reasonable to expect the two hard-working students gain something from their effort besides a score. A further look at the choices they made may provide possible answer to this mystery.

Cheryl and Sandra performed different tasks; however, the nature of the work they did was the same. Sandra did three basic-level tasks due to practical concerns, while Cheryl paired with Lily in two intermediate-level tasks, in which she memorized the dialogs mostly written by Lily. Therefore, both Cheryl and Sandra prepared for the final in the same way—they both memorized the lines. On the opposing side, participants who felt skill growth all constructed their own scripts, using integrated skills for the performance tasks. Writing scripts was the part most complained about, but also the part that produced the most learning. This finding may lead to an explanation of why Cheryl and Sandra were not benefited as much as the other participants. Additionally, Ken made a supplemental contrast: He did one intermediate- (actually advanced-) and one basic-level task; a higher sense of achievement was sensed in the higher-level project.

Traditional tests, developed from a behaviorist perspective, emphasize rote recall and have negative impact on teaching and learning (Gipps, 1999; Shepard, 2000). This has been clear since Confucius warned that one who learns but does not think, is lost (Confucius, Trans. 1938) [學而不思則罔] (Zhu, 1994, 論語爲政第二 2.15), which emphasizes the importance of dynamic reflection versus rote memorization (Hsu, 1996; Huang, 1975; Tsai, 1970). According to Brown and Hudson (1998), authentic performance tasks in language assessment, usually using productive skills, approximate engaging and meaningful performance in realistic settings. Compared with traditional standardized tests, performance assessments elicit constructed responses to provide more valid information on various areas of language skills and can function as instructional activities to induce learning (Norris, Brown, Hudson, & Yoshioka, 1998); this type of assessment is probably the most appropriate for measuring the productive skills of speaking and writing (Brown & Hudson, 1998). On the same note, Messick (1996) stated that in language assessment, tasks with authenticity and directness facilitate positive consequences for teaching and learning.

With light shed from relevant literature, the mystery of no improvement seemed resolved. Judged from the nature of tasks performed, what Cheryl and Sandra did was actually a traditional test, because they only repeated what had been taken by rote, but did not engage in constructing script and then performing it with productive language use as well as interaction of receptive and productive skills. The finding can relate back to the first two dimensions discussed above. Combining all three topics of score, task level, and assessment type, the debate spells out a formula of true learning: given choices, students are motivated to make effort, which will harvest when engaging constructive work.

Another question floated up at this point: What was the perspective of other participants who also took basic-level tasks? The only other participant who took three basic-level tasks as well was Mike in Focus Group 2. Mike has a low in-class ranking. Throughout the interview, he had been collegial and responsive, but only with short replies, and most of the time he seconded other group members' opinions. In the beginning, he had commented that choices are meaningless; however, he was unable to articulate a rational statement to explain his idea,

我覺得沒有意義，因為背那個…就是要掌握自己的能力…有自己的能力範圍可以去…如果覺得太困難的話，沒有辦法去承受的話，那就…比較沒有辦法做出…那個…那分數就很不高!

[I think it is meaningless, because memorizing the...you're supposed to know your own ability...in the manageable range...if it's too difficult and you can't handle it, then ...you can't do well...and the score will not be good!]

In this narrative, Mike did not explain why choices were meaningless and did not respond to follow-up questions to account for this. Nevertheless, he did communicate a message that one should take what is manageable or else he or she is risking the score.

Afterwards, Mike's attitude shifted toward the positive side, and he repeatedly expressed, being the only one among the participants, that he was glad about the availability of bonus project. Toward the close of the interview, he was the first one in the group to say that choice was good because it takes differences of readiness into consideration, and he thought the levels were set appropriately. In addition, he agreed on what Dick stated: to put on a quality performance, one has to be well prepared. Acknowledging choices of leveled tasks, he said his confidence was lifted.

In comparison, Mike appeared to be more receptive to choice than Cheryl and Sandra. Doing the same type of projects, he came to appreciate that choices gave him the chance to perform what suits him, reduced the stress, and helped him gain more confidence after making effort to prepare well. He was pleased with having the opportunity to try out new options so to know his level better and perform accordingly. Taking academic level as a possible factor, differences in academic level did lead to different needs; higher achievers tend to expect more challenges whereas low achievers need tasks attending to their levels. Therefore, it is possible that Cheryl and Sandra were not adequately challenged in the final examination due to the type of tasks they undertook, while Mike had found the tasks appropriate for him.

Suggestions as Inspiration for Improvement

Concerns caused by the new assessment format pointed to two general areas for future improvement: implementation and task. These suggestions were made in the hope that tiered performance tasks would continue to aid English language learning. As presented in Chapter Four, suggestions regarding implementation were about time, performance format, and performing opportunities, while suggestions regarding task were concerning choice and level. The following section starts with a brief recall of the suggestions and then proceeds with more in-depth discussion.

Implementation

Because most participants felt time was pressing preparing the multiple tasks in addition to many other tests, early announcement would allow more time and thus make the preparation less hectic. Also because of the multiple tasks required, the assessment time was prolonged making the assessment a tiring process. More importantly, Dick pointed out that constant performing opportunities would help ease the tension, and improve quality of performance, if

administered in an ongoing fashion with shortened intervals in between. As many supporters of alternative assessment advocated, authentic assessment should employ non-intrusive tasks worthwhile as instruction and/or extension of the day-to-day classroom activities (Brown & Hudson, 1998; Norris, Brown, Hudson, & Yoshioka, 1998). Assessment in form of daily activities not only provides the teacher opportunities to observe student learning more closely, but lessens stress and anxiety so students can perform in the assessment as they normally do.

Jo, Lily, plus all members in Focus Group 1 proposed changing performing format to short play in small groups. They listed reasons such as short plays are more interesting, more interactive, less demanding, and promoting teamwork. The extent the participants were enthusiastic about group-performed short plays was surprising at first. Yet, it makes more sense when relating to the kind of choices Cheryl preferred, which is discussed below.

Task

Choice. Along with further discussion in Focus Group 1, what Cheryl anticipated from choices came into light. She commented on the topic about teachers offering students some say in their learning process. This is what she thought,

C: 老師會跟我們討論的話...大家會想說我就是適合這樣，在英文對話方面可能不會想有更多的成長。如果老師直接告訴我們要做些什麼，我們不能反對，只好改變自己，去達到老師的目標。

I: 哦...如果老師挑一些對你們有一點挑戰性的，再分等級，讓你們選擇呢？

C: 這樣還蠻好的。

J: 蠻不錯的。〔S&L表同意〕

I: 所以，妳覺得老師還是該給妳一些規範跟引導，可是這其中還有選擇的餘地，這樣就不錯？

C: 就是這樣。

[C: If the teacher asks for our opinions, we will think: This is how I am, and will not try to achieve further growth in English oral skills. If the teacher tells us directly what we need to do, as students we cannot go up against the decision, so we will have to change ourselves to meet the teacher's objectives.

I: Oh, what if the teacher picks some challenging tasks, which are leveled, for you to choose?

C: That's pretty good.

J: That's really nice. (Liz and Sandra nodded to agree.)

I: So, you prefer the teacher to frame the choices for you in a certain range. Will that be good?

C: Just like that.]

(C: Cheryl, J: Jenny, I: the researcher/interviewer)

Once more, Cheryl voiced a traditional Chinese student's expectation of the instructor. Obviously, she held doubts about students' ability in executing learning ownership, although she did sense the benefits of autonomy. Needing assurance from the instructor, she would feel more comfortable given clear guidance from the instructor. Like the Asian students depicted in Lee's (2005) article, Cheryl projected the image of conventional conservative students who tend to be dependent despite the belief in active participation. Students like Cheryl regard class as a context for receiving instruction and guided practice. Even though they understand that it is constructive to have clear personal purpose in undertaking language learning, in practice their expectations of

the teacher inhibits them from doing so. Cheryl expected the instructor to take a more decisive position in selecting instructional goals which automatically set limit to the students' learning objectives. As a result, seeing the advantages of having choices, she asked for leveled options that are evidently framed by the instructor trusting that learning goals filtered by the instructor would serve her better.

Traditional Chinese students like Cheryl will likely grow academically in a trusting relationship with the instructor. In the interviews, the participants made various guesses about the instructor's intention of giving the final examination a new face, as none of them remembered that Ms. Lin had provided her rationale behind the changes. The suppositions offered by the participants reflected their beliefs that Ms. Lin would do her best to make productive teaching and learning possible, after the initial shock aroused by this new test format and the turmoil of their final examination period had all sunk.

Robin had been quiet in the beginning of Focus Group 2, but when the question was raised about reasons of the new assessment format she responded right away in a sure tone, "She [Ms. Lin] wants to know our levels." Being the head of class officers, Lily suggested, "I think Ms. Lin did it considering that each student is at a different level; the level range is pretty big in our class." Jo also offered a reason, "She [Ms. Lin] wanted us to try a different way to see if we would work harder." It seemed that Dick felt the same that the class should perform better and creatively, so he judged, "she wishes that we will do it the way we like....to do what we want, to perform in our own way. Maybe it will bring out a better result." On a similar note, Sandra said, "Probably she doesn't want to limit us within the range she sets, so we can decide the way we want [to perform]."

Implied in the participants' reasoning about the assessment is a genuine trust in the instructor. Each of the suggestions pointed to a good will that the instructor might base her decisions. The participants believed that Ms. Lin, out of care about their learning, went through complicated processes to design the multiple test projects, which was evident from taking a look at the task descriptions and scoring rubric (Appendix B). Ms. Lin said that she spent long hours scoring the students' final examinations.

The confidence in the instructor's devotion to effective teaching accounts for Cheryl's preference of choices preset within a range by the instructor. In turn, the preference elucidates why most participants subscribed to short plays that they performed in mid-term examination for another class. In that class they had watched a film *Polar Express*, from which they were free to pick a portion to perform at their disposal of adopting, adapting, or altering the plot, characters, and dialogues. The film they previously watched served as a model to imitate or to fetch inspiration from and the dialogue transcripts were available online, so they had the freedom of deciding how far to go in terms of being creative. Thus, manifolds of options are available for the students to choose a complexity level that is deemed suitable. This performing project was somewhat similar to the intermediate-level tasks most participants took in this final examination, for which a base conversation was provided, and some, but not too dramatic, changes could be made with instructor-selected expressions (see Appendix B). Group-performed plays have an additional advantage of promoting teamwork in a social setting.

The two most participant-accepted forms of tasks are short plays in groups and the intermediate-level task of slight modification to published dialogues and performances. The participants suggested that choices are welcome and beneficial to learning on the condition that instructor expectations are made clear and tasks are at appropriate levels. Closely tied to the

notion of clear instructor expectations are explicit assessment criteria that Shepard (2000) advocated. “Transparency” (p. 11) is the idea Shepard used to explain the need for students to have a clear understanding of the criteria by which their work will be assessed. Shepard emphasized that having access to assessment criteria satisfies a sense of fairness, which Lily celebrated in the interview. She said it is democratic and fair having criteria spelled out for students. Meanwhile, the openness of teacher expectations and assessment criteria pave a solid foundation for trusting relationship between the teacher and learners.

Collectively, the participants sparked an understanding that recalls how differentiation is made for product in a differentiating classroom. Tomlinson (2001) suggests that teachers make the assignment clear to students to avoid confusion and frustration and adaptations of the task may be made according to student readiness while offering challenge at a suitable level. If construction of product proceeds in a social context where interaction channels self-regulated learning and scaffolding is available, then learners’ affective needs are also attended. In addition to principles of differentiating product, Krashen’s formula of comprehensible input as “*i+1*” (Krashen & Terrell, 1983) and Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory plus concept of ZPD were all summoned up. It appeared that the participants, although without idea of these conceptual constructs, had used their lived experience to affirm the theoretical underpinnings of differentiated instruction.

Level. Stemming from discussions about choice, two out-spoken participants, Lily in an individual interview and Dick in Focus Group 2 unanimously suggested deleting basic-level tasks in different occasions. While Robin and May in Focus Group 2 suggested allowing more flexibility in script composing (which was opposite to Cheryl’s wish for framed choices mentioned in Focus Group 1), suddenly the topic shifted and there came a hot debate regarding

basic-level tasks. When Dick indicated that such tasks were meaningless, May and Robin agreed with nodding and smiles. Alex opposed right away, in a soft voice though. He gently explained the ready-made conversations to be memorized are authentic English that are being used by native speakers of English in daily life; therefore they are worth remembering. He believed learning more of those dialogues would build up a repertoire to draw from in future applications. He further explained the need was out of his recent laborious script construction,

我們寫劇本時，會覺得文法好像不對，又不太熟悉外國人的習俗…所以我們都是用台灣式的英文法去編寫，有時會覺得怪怪的…如果能用現成的劇本，口語的表達會更道地。背自己寫的劇本會覺得沒有進步…我覺得要有人指導，可是這樣老師會比較累…如果平時背了很多句子的話，在跟外國人對話時，就可以很自然的應用出來。而且，沒有這些基礎自己寫劇本時，要花很多時間查字典。

[When composing scripts, we often feel there is something wrong with the grammatical structures. And we do not know Western norms well enough, so we write the scripts with Taiwanese English. It feels weird...If we can use ready-made script, our oral performances will be better. It feels like we are not making progress memorizing our own scripts...I think we need someone to guide us, but that will exhaust the teacher...If we memorize many sentences as a regular practice, we will be able to use them naturally when conversing with a foreigner. Besides, without the basics it takes much time to look up expressions we need in the dictionary to compose scripts.]

The debate lasted for quite a while. A quick vote confirmed that all but Dick thought basic-level tasks were needed. Nevertheless, Dick still tried hard to stress that conversations for

basic-level tasks are contents repeatedly covered in class; therefore the students were supposed to have mastered them before examination. More to the point, in contact with foreigners, the dialogue would be a natural flow; it would be impossible to deliver what one had memorized in such situations. He concluded that it would make more sense if basic-level tasks were adjusted to stretch students' competence.

I deemed it necessary to mediate because the interview had proceeded for more than an hour. A wrap-up summary bore out that due to readiness differences, requirements of different complexity level were needed to suite individual needs. It was also verified by the participants that some memorization may be useful to facilitate further development—such basic-level tasks had been designed to make sure fundamental skills were mastered by all. Mike quickly acknowledged his approval with another smile.

As the top-ranked student in the class, Alex shed light on how he achieves English learning in the educational environment in Taiwan. He values authentic materials and believes some knowledge firmly secured in memory will serve some purposes someday. Memory-related strategies have been widely used among Chinese learners of English. While they are commonly recognized as not necessarily involving deep understanding (Oxford, 2001), Alex found them helpful in the past and expected the strategies to keep working for him. He voiced the need of instructor scaffolding, and then mentioned the use of memorization as an alternative when assistance from the instructor was not available.

Reasonably inferred, Alex's belief in memorization has derived from successful experience in the traditional testing culture that encourages rote recall. It is imaginable that many high academic achievers in Taiwan have employed similar strategies to reach their status as excellent students defined in a positivist view. This finding may count as an additional

elucidation of the general lack of English proficiency in Taiwanese students, particularly in technical and vocational education system. However, researchers have seen some use for memorizing vocabulary and structures in initial stages and maintained that use of learning strategies is significantly related to culture (Oxford, 2001). The common use of rote memorization in traditional Chinese education possibly has risen as a measure reactive to the teaching contexts specific to Chinese societies. Perhaps Cheryl and Sandra will realize someday that the conversations they practiced for this final examination are not totally useless. In particular, Mike had made concerted effort in three basic-level tasks for this final examination and earned a better-than-before grade therewith. For a low achiever like him, the conversations he memorized could possibly help him move along in the development of English ability.

Acceptance of Tiered Performance Tasks

The first-time experience with tiered performance tasks demonstrated to the participants that various possibilities can be achieved when choices are available. Innovativeness mixed with a combination of shock and puzzle was the impression all the participants felt about tiered performance tasks at the outset. Once the initial confusion was resolved, the participants realized that the new format was designed to attend individual differences through leveled choices and varying degrees of challenge. The tiered tasks offered them greater ownership in the evaluation of their English skills, compared with no say in traditional test situations. Promoted autonomy aroused a desire to take up challenges that at the same time entailed higher level of stress and efforts in order to reach the self-determined score range. Making efforts to breakthrough acquired patterns and limits, the participants noted benefits of tiered performance tasks; they sensed stronger motivation, improved English skills, and heightened self-confidence. Although a

couple of participants did not sense expected skill improvement, they understood the choices of leveled tasks were to offer better possibilities and autonomy in their learning.

On the other hand, greater autonomy also made it possible to back away from challenges for reduced stress. In a less stressful situation, some participants saw expectancy of success and became motivated and effortful, while the others chose easy tasks to avoid hard work. Engagement in constructive effort with reduced anxiety could also bring up English skills and self-confidence. Overall, the participants realized that choices could make a difference in their learning, either choosing challenges or easy tasks conditional on personal preferences and whether benefited from the leveled task in this assessment or not as a result of task nature.

At the same time, the participants reached an understanding of the purposes of this authentic assessment with tiered performance tasks. The awareness did not surface until the hassle and hustle of final examination finally settled down. As an after thought on the assessment experience, the purposes are:

To better understand each student's ability (by Robin)

To attend individual differences in academic level (by Lily)

To allow greater learner autonomy in consideration of student opinions (by Sandra)

To draw out more effort from students (by Jo)

To encourage authentic and creative performance (by Dick)

To inform instructional decisions (by Ken)

In their own words, the participants articulated purposes of the assessment more from the instructor's perspective than theirs, forgetting they made the major party in the assessment and what the assessment should serve for them. According to Tompkins (2002), authentic assessment helps teachers learn about their students, about themselves as teachers, and about the influences

of the instruction. Similarly, through reflecting on their learning and self assessment, students learn about themselves as learners and also about their learning,

In fact, when announcing and explaining the final examination, Ms. Lin told the class it was important to know where they were at and set a goal of where they want to go next. Self-assessment was a main purpose the instructor expected the class to keep in mind in this assessment, hopefully in the future, too. Shepard (2000) indicated, “student self-assessment serves cognitive purposes...it also promises to increase students’ responsibility for their own learning and to make the relationship between teachers and students more collaborative” (p. 12).

Although interpreting the assessment purposes somewhat different from the instructor, the participants acknowledged tiered performance tasks and made suggestions for changes to improve the assessment implementation, which would eventually render more innovative assessment designs that stimulate the desire to undertake challenges for better learning. In Figure 2, the participants’ perspectives on tiered performance tasks were illustrated.

Chapter Summary

Seven themes emerged from the participants’ perspectives on tiered performance tasks: 1) choices as the roots of all possibilities, 2) self-determined score range as a manifestation of autonomy, 3) challenges as chances for breakthrough, 4) motivation and efforts as results of leveled tasks, 5) skills and confidence as natural flows from efforts, 6) concerns as warning of potential pitfalls, and 7) suggestions as inspiration of future improvement. All the themes link together resulted from the offering of choices and finally led to an overall acknowledgement and acceptance of tiered performance tasks. The innovative assessment format features leveled choices of tasks and self-determined score range that facilitated various possibilities as well as

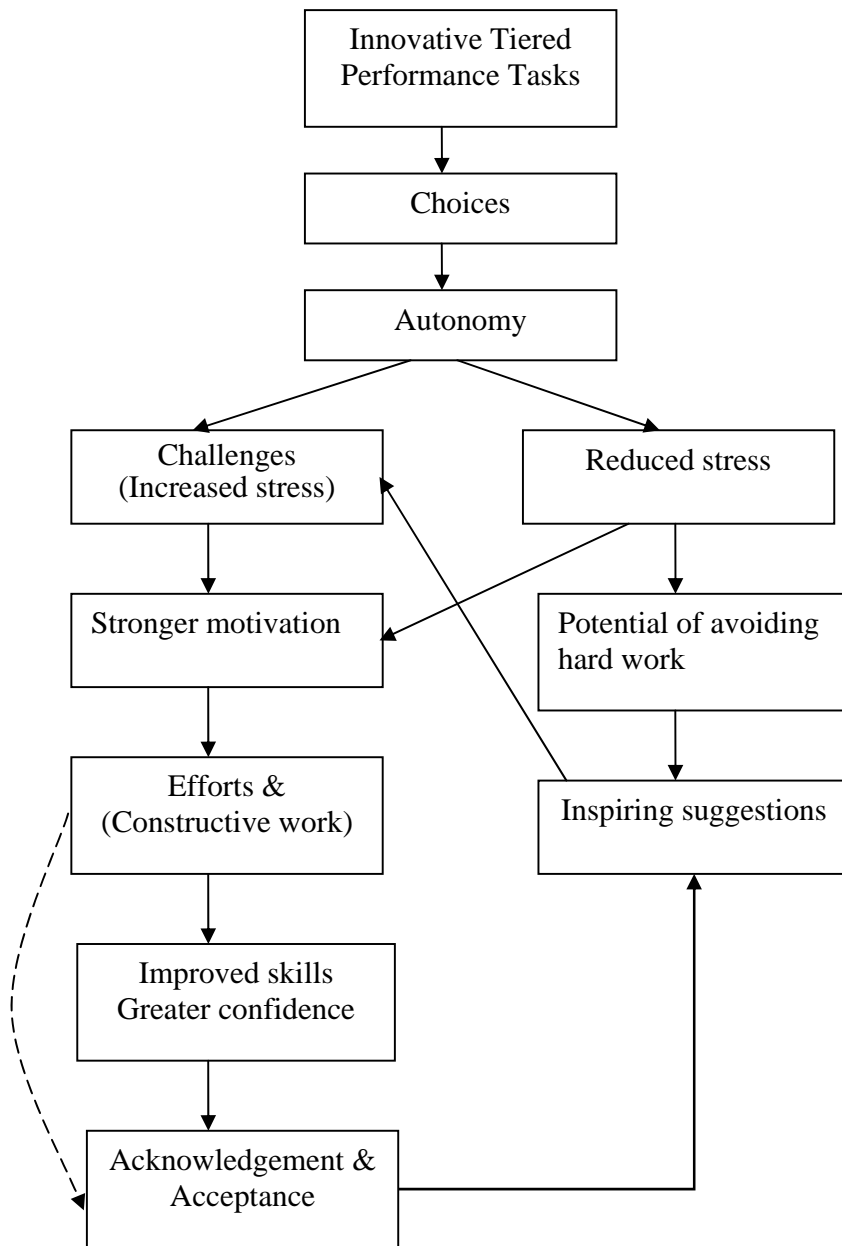


Figure 2. Participants' Perspectives on Tiered Performance Tasks.

greater autonomy. In consideration of factors such as task complexity, time demands, collaboration between partners and score, personal traits directed the participants to various task preferences, thus experiencing different outcomes in terms of motivation, effort, skill and confidence. The participants recognized benefits of choice and autonomy, and reckoned the

assessment was well-intended. They demonstrated an overall acceptance to tiered performance tasks, making suggestions to inspire future implementation, in the hope that such authentic assessment would continue to be in place to promote their English language learning.

Interwoven in the general recognition and acceptance of tiered performance task was an indication that students at different levels need different degree of guidance due to personal factors and experiences. It is indeed vital that educators sensitively scrutinize students' responses as well as attitudes to instructional practices, so to align task orientation to that of learners. Frequent review of students' perspectives lends a hand to truthfully reflect learner needs and maximize learning capacity (Ma, 2005). Regardless readiness level, all learners need instructor expectations made clear and evaluation criteria accessible for a positive assessment experience.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS

The overarching question guiding this study is: Is differentiated instruction applicable in college EFL classrooms in Taiwan? As an initial probe to the likelihood, this study set the investigation in an assessment scene in a freshmen class. There were two sub-questions specifically regarding the assessment strategy often used in differentiated instruction, tiered performance tasks:

1. What are college EFL students' perspectives on tiered performance tasks?
2. What are the implications of these perspectives to EFL learning and teaching?

Through text and tabular presentation in Chapter Four as well as a discussion of emerging themes in Chapter Five, I arrived at some conclusions and implications suggested in the rich data provided by the participants. These concluding discoveries are presented below to wrap up the present study.

In the course of interviewing, the participants' perceptions concerning tiered performance tasks gradually revealed themselves, either as a shared group opinion or a personal interpretation of the experience. By talking about the experiences and points of view, the participants displayed a development of organizing thoughts into clear understanding of, even distinctive judgment about or attitudes toward certain aspects of the assessment, as shaped by the new experience. It seemed that not only I obtained valuable information, but also the participants learned more about themselves. The fact that the significance of this recent experience developed a sharper focus for the participants during the process of sharing and discussing confirmed Hutchinson, Wilson, and Wilson's (1994) assertion of participants being able to benefit from the interview.

The participants' perspectives wove together and created a holistic picture of their first encounter with tiered performance tasks. Therefore, the following discussion takes the responses as constructed whole, rather than as separate pieces that shed light on EFL learning and teaching.

Concluding Discussion

EFL Learning and Teaching

As presented in Chapter Five, the participants shared distinctive perspectives toward tiered performance tasks. They indicated an overall recognition and acceptance of tiered performance tasks. The participants expressed that the assessment experience with the innovative leveled performance tasks was constructive and led to skill advancement. Appealing choices of leveled task offered the autonomy to target a desired score range, although the privileges come with certain concerns. To most of the participants, the choices signified challenges to be taken up to their decisions, which fed into their sense of ownership. On the other hand, increased requirements from the challenges intensified the participants' anxieties about quality of their performance which determined if they could get a score in the desired range, thus urged them to make extra efforts in an attempt to meet the challenges. The findings signified positive results such as stronger motivation, improved English skills, and heightened self confidence, especially in low achieving learners. The participants generally acknowledged tiered performance tasks as an authentic form of assessment and welcomed greater autonomy in their English language learning.

Autonomy

Underlying all these themes is the concept of autonomy that links the discussions together. All the participants agreed that autonomy, honored by choice-making, was the best part of their assessment experience with tiered performance tasks. Choice provided a chance for the

participants to decide on tasks that were manageable and challenging to them. As opposed to what they were used to in a traditional test situation, in which the participants could only comply with what was required to do without any say, they were given greater ownership in this recent evaluation of their English oral skills. Early in the process, they decided on a partner to work with. Exercising autonomy, the partners chose the desired possible score range and worked for this self-directed goal. This fresh feeling of being the masters nourished a sense of satisfaction and brought up their motivation to engage deeper. Besides task level, the type of work required was also a chance for the participants to be in charge. Engaging in constructing scripts, they chose a preferred way to incorporate all the assigned materials into one piece. Every step in the assessment walked the participants toward higher ownership through choice. This is how differentiated instruction provides the learner ownership in assessment.

A pool of research indicates that autonomous learners work effectively and with higher motivation (e.g., Nunan, 1995). Supportive outcomes include positive attitudes toward English, intrinsically motivated learners, and more effective learning strategy usage when customized learning opportunities fit learners' needs and students' awareness of English learning process is raised (Huang, 1999). However, educators warned that learner autonomy may not suit Asian countries due to learning and teaching traditions (e.g., Lee, 2005).

The above caution applies to the present study. Autonomy, although appealing, caused much anxiety and concern in the participants. First of all, many participants had to think carefully to make their decisions on tasks, then reservation about choice brought up other issues to ponder, and finally, Cheryl explicitly asked for more instructor guidance along the way towards autonomy. As researchers pointed out, involving learners in the learning process inevitably encounters some constraints, which often come from culturally related learning styles

and beliefs (Lee, 2005). Lee found that culturally derived beliefs and a perceived inability to learn independently of some Asian learners could impede students from adopting an autonomous learning approach. Asian students tend to regard teachers as expert figures and remain dependent (Wan, 2001). Similarly, Littlejohn (1983) saw that in current practice, there is still a widespread belief among learners that in order to learn one has to be taught. He then states that probably the greatest constraint in applying notions of learner control is the learners themselves. Considering societal and cultural factors, Littlewood (1999) suggested careful examination of the specific educational context before jumping in any decision,

Teachers in East Asian countries should neither simply accept nor simply reject the outcomes of the discussions about autonomy that have taken place in the West. Rather, they should examine these discussions in relations to their specific contexts and try to match different aspects of autonomy with the characteristics and needs of their learners. (p. 72).

Encouraging greater learner accountability is actually fostering some qualities of good language learners, such as the ability to tolerate ambiguity, to take risks, to study alone, and to suspend doubts (Littlejohn, 1983; Rubin, 1975). Therefore, a culturally sensitive approach to autonomous education does not just generally promote learning, but also specifically leads to successful language learning experience. In an EFL environment, English learning is not an easy task. Learners like Cheryl may need to be supported and shown how to become self-aware and to employ learning strategies. Consequently, a teacher's guidance is crucial in fostering learner autonomy.

To bring learners into a more central role in making educational decisions, Littlejohn (1983) suggests concentrating on learners' prior experiences and expectations while applying a

gradual approach toward relinquishing the teacher's dominant role. The more learners become involved, the more likely teacher-led classrooms are to be avoided, and at the same time, a more conducive culturally responsive classroom atmosphere develops and encourages accessible learning (Littlejohn, 1983).

Motivation and Effort

Other participants, such as Lily and Robin, expressed comparatively more self-regulation. As a result, Lily prefers more challenges, and Robin pushes herself forward at all times. They use metacognitive strategies to direct self-learning as well as other learning strategies to make English learning easier for themselves. As Lily shared her experience, she takes every possible way to expose herself in the target language, and she placed high expectations for herself. With a positive attitude, she enjoys English learning. Robin provides another model; she goes all-out in every occasion, whether it is uniform or leveled task and regardless it is a regular assignment or a major test. Expecting to reach the top, she tells herself, "Just do your best!"

In contrast with most Taiwanese students in the technical and vocational education system who demonstrate passive learning attitudes and weak learning motivation for English (Wu, 2006), the high achieving participants in this study displayed strong motivation, which is claimed as one of the most important determinants of language achievement (Gass & Selinker, 2001). Bandura (1996) asserted that students with higher self-efficacy are more likely to take up difficult tasks, use more effort, and achieve higher level of comprehension. These participants fit in the description and set models for peers to follow.

In the present study, not only high-ranking students were motivated, low-standing students demonstrated enthusiasm in completing the tasks as well. These participants responded positively by making extra efforts and gained a sense of achievement. For example, some low-

achieving participants chose intermediate-level tasks (e.g., Jenny and Liz), or even advanced-level tasks (Ken). Yet, quite the opposite, a high-achieving student, Jo, did intermediate- and basic-level tasks and Sandra, a middle-ranking student, did three basic-level tasks. Then, here is a question: Is it true that being allowed the freedom to choose, students, especially low-achieving ones, tend to avoid hard work as they are still likely to make decent scores when making less effort?

Ma (2005) and Wang (2005) argued that low achieving students are not necessarily unmotivated. Bruner (1960) suggested teachers to facilitate learning success by providing learners with the motivating vision that the knowledge gained now will be usable in the future. In the same vein, Lin (1997) pointed out that one of the goals of technological and vocational educational reform in Taiwan is to promote students' sense of promise about their future and the prospect that their future is full of chance for further study. It appeared that in the recent final examination, using tiered performance tasks, the low-achieving participants saw a promise of getting a better score and to show their talents, or at least, to demonstrate their efforts; therefore, they were willing to engage in the demanding tasks and finally enhanced self-confidence. The contented smile on Mike's face when mentioning his tasks would make a pleasing reward for the instructor's hard work.

Other participants, who made constant endeavors in English learning, also seemed to be motivated by something tangible. All three individual interviewees, Lily, Jo, and Ken, expressed a pragmatic view of learning English—for future career and daily applications. Lily and Jo enjoyed a sense of achievement from getting good grades, whereas Ken's motivation is sustained by the vision of using fluent English in occasions beyond school settings.

Performance

In current practice, student performance is usually evaluated in a set-aside assessment situation, in which anxious feelings often occur. About half of the participants referred to anxiety when performing on stage. They were nervous for various reasons, but their anxiety mostly originated from worries about poor performances, which frequently related to learner identity (Reay & Wiliam, 1999).

Some participants shared their tips of staying calm to achieve well during the assessment. One thing common in their statement was that they worked hard to prepare. Once they were well-prepared, they felt less stressed. Especially impressive were Robin and Alex. Both of them replied to the inquiry briefly as they regarded the test as normal, nothing special to talk about. It was not that they did not work hard for the final examination, but that they have been working hard all the time, even when it was not for a major test.

The key to good performance, according to these learners, is *effort*, then. Where is it rooted? According to the participants, their efforts were motivated by an expectancy of success in achieving self-chosen goals. As such, all the above accounts connect to one another; autonomy/self-efficacy, motivation, effort, and performance are inseparable in making a positive learning experience. Although the implementation of tiered performance tasks in this final examination was not without flaws, the participants' narratives did confirm that these important elements of successful learning were evident within this assessment strategy, which is often employed in differentiated instruction.

Implications

This study was an exploration of the applicability of differentiated instruction in the EFL context in Taiwan. As differentiated instruction is a comprehensive philosophy and instructional approach encompassing all-around aspects of instruction, I chose to focus on the assessment

dimension of differentiated instruction using tiered performance tasks as the initial exploration of the possibility. This focal point was a result of considering that traditional tests have exerted potent negative influences on learning and learner identity. In particular, educational systems in Taiwan have been influenced by conventional summative assessment for generations, and students are conditioned to English instruction that does not produce satisfactory English competencies (Liao, 2007; Nunan, 2003). This study was therefore conducted in a college EFL classroom in the hope that an authentic assessment strategy in differentiated instruction could possibly be a remedy to the current assessment practice in Taiwan.

Differentiated Instruction in EFL Context

Tiered performance tasks in this study have received an overall acknowledgement and acceptance from the participants. Does the finding suggest that differentiated instruction will be applicable in the EFL environment in Taiwan? Personal factors must be considered in any answer.

Personal Factors

A language learner brings into the classroom a wide array of personal factors: personality, intelligence profile, learning styles, language learning strategies, affective traits, world knowledge, and metalinguistic awareness (Barnitz, 1986, 2002; Gass & Selinker, 2001; Oxford, 2004). Specifically relevant to foreign language learning is the socially and culturally defined language ability (Anstey & Bull, 2006). Throughout the study, personal factors of each participant have come into play. Hints of personal traits were evident in decision-making, task choice and performance, interaction with peers, the instructor, and me, the researcher/interviewer.

It was interesting to note various personalities of the participants. Some of them displayed distinct personalities which were easy to tell, while some held intriguing traits that

took some thought to understand. During the individual interviews, a closer contact was possible, allowing more careful observation of the participants. Lily was a sunny character—enthusiastic, outspoken, and straightforward, which explains her desire for challenges; advanced-level tasks were a fit for her. Jo was soft and smooth, courteous, and somewhat reserved; in retrospect, a mixture of intermediate- and basic-level tasks seemed to be appropriate for her. Ken appeared to be an eager young man with an optimistic nature. He was adventurous, willing to try difficult tasks without much consideration of the reality. Although the advanced-level task was a little beyond his grasp, he invested much time and energy to master it, with help from Alex and by sacrificing his performance in the other task, which was basic-level, and therefore did not achieve close to his desired score.

Personal traits hid under the disguise of complexity, time, and partnership in the participants' pursuit of best possible scores. The course of deciding on tasks to undertake between partners displayed the participants' personality characteristics. As Sandra has stated, she decided on tasks considering her partner's personality. Alex, a recognized high achiever, was a typical good student in the Chinese educational system. He has the ability to accomplish quality performance. However, he was so concerned that he could not be as perfect as he expected to be that he wanted to settle with an intermediate-level task when paired with Ken. He was also concerned with the quality of the scripts that he had constructed and would have preferred to use ready-made conversations instead of making his own. In Focus Group 2, he was a quiet member compared with the others; he spoke softly even when confronting Dick regarding deletion of basic-level tasks. His reluctance to risk also showed up in hesitation to question the others when he found they had mistaken the mid-term examination in a different class for the mid-term in this Listening and Speaking class. Alex seemed to have demonstrated the characteristics of high-

achieving students who suffer from perfectionism and sense anxiety in seeking acknowledgement from others (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002).

In contrast, Ken, with a positive nature, was daring and aspired to try challenging tasks. When he perceived Alex's worry about his ability to stage a good performance, he complied with Alex's wish to perform a lower level project, not knowing that Alex would finally compromise and go with the advance-level task as he wished. Perhaps, the incentive of a possible higher score lured Alex to change his mind, because he mentioned that the reason for undertaking advanced-level task was a potentially better score. Given that Ken appeared to be easy-going, it could be also possible that Ken was so careless that he had misunderstood Alex all along. (He showed up for the interview an hour earlier, breaking into the room where an interview with Jo was going on.) Besides, considering that Alex was a perfectionist, perhaps he never wanted to do an intermediate-level task.

The above description of participants revealed merely a corner of their personal traits. The purpose of providing the description is to argue that personal factors influence the learner's learning experience, affecting their perceptions, learning attitudes as well as strategies, and actual performance. All these manifest the importance of attending to personal differences in the EFL classroom.

Personal Needs

In a nurturing climate for learning, differentiated instruction provides an appropriate fit for each learner through proactive planning. Instructors using differentiated instruction think about the classroom with the dual goals of honoring each student's learning needs and maximizing each student's learning capacity (Tomlinson & Edison, 2003). In an attempt to foster

achievement, differentiated instruction makes every effort to offer the learner plenty of choices that lead to success throughout the learning process.

The assessment strategy of tiered performance task was employed in this study as a measure to address individual differences. According to Tomlinson (2001), well-designed product assignments can be excellent motivating and assessing tools. In this final examination the instructor provided leveled tasks with a major purpose in mind: to match the students with suitable tasks of their own choice. Judging from the participants' responses, the purpose was fulfilled.

As suggested by the analysis, differentiated instruction is more than applicable in this specific EFL classroom in Taiwan; it is needed to address the importance of personal attributes by attending to individual differences. Spreading all over the data, personal factors have appeared as hidden dynamic forces affecting every aspect of the English language assessment process. Moreover, tiered performance tasks as an assessment format is especially meaningful to low-standing students as it provides them an accessible stage to demonstrate their potential, while high achievers seemed not in as much need of the challenges and choices because they are always self-regulated, powered with strong intrinsic motivation. This finding is particularly relevant to the technical and vocational education system in Taiwan, because students in the system are suffering from weak English proficiency due to low motivation.

It is illustrated in Figure 3 how differentiated instruction promotes EFL learning by comprehensively addressing personal factors through tiered performance tasks. In the figure, the top categories were hierarchical, with the lower parts cyclic. The assessment started from the offer of tiered performance tasks that enhances learner autonomy and then leads to better learning results in general. During the whole assessment process, autonomy acted as a significant

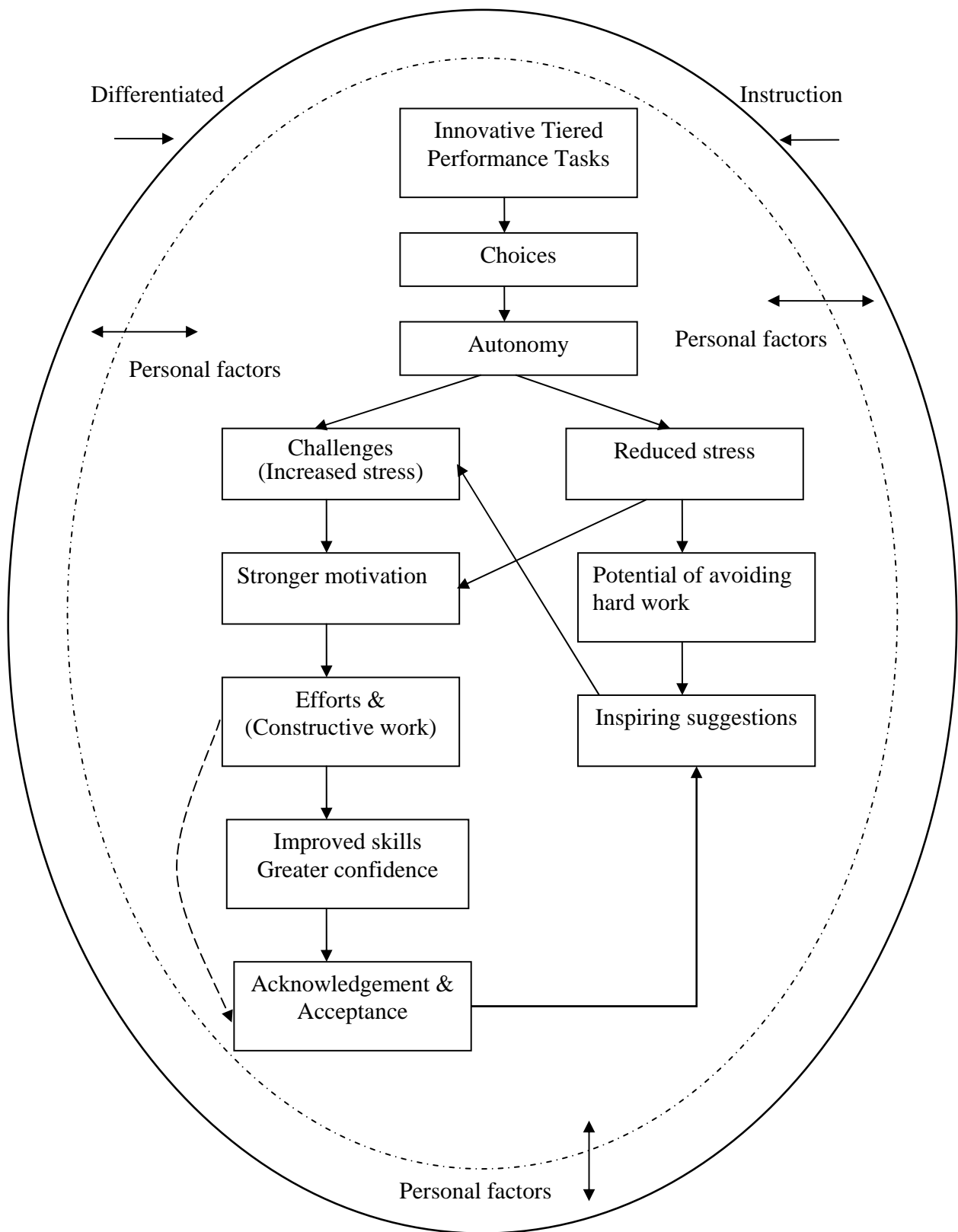


Figure 3. Application of Differentiated Instruction through Tiered Performance Tasks.

agent linking all the possibilities. Autonomy came from the chances to make decisions and it increased motivation as well as willingness to make efforts. Performance was therefore likely to improve. Yet, in exercising autonomy, personal traits penetrated into every choice the participants made and created various possibilities with diverse results. Differentiated instruction expansively supported all sorts of personal variables and thus sustained learning on all sides.

Teacher-Learner Relationship

I wanted my language classroom to be a place where students felt comfortable and wanted to talk. I wanted to be the kind of person that they would want to talk to (Horwitz, 1999, p. 48).

Above all, an EFL classroom needs to be a place where students feel comfortable and want to talk, and the EFL teacher needs to be a person whom students would want to talk to (Horwitz, 1999). A mutually beneficial teacher-student relationship is the foundation of effective language teaching and assessment. Assessment starts with knowing the students, and this cannot be achieved without good relationship with students. Teachers need to communicate with students regarding expectations and assessment criteria; if students do not trust the teacher they would not take the teacher's words. In addition, when scoring criteria are clear and fair, it is easier for the students to accept their grades and feedbacks made by the teacher. With such connection established, assessment can be assuring and positively informing for both the teacher and students in the sense of setting the mind at rest in confidence.

The participants in the present study, commented positively on everything related to the instructor, which suggested a healthy relationship had been established. When considering the reasons the instructor had for making changes to the final examination, the participants articulated their beliefs in the instructor's willingness to address most students' needs, which has been shown

to be very beneficial to students (Ma, 2005; Shie, 1994). This trusting relationship helped the participants appreciate the instructor more. Seeing that the assessment had a complicated format and additional requirements for them, the participants understood that the changes meant heavier workload for the instructor, too. The instructor took the challenge along with her students and put herself in a more equitable position to the students.

In a learner-centered EFL curriculum, the instructor is a facilitator, offering appropriate guidance to induce self-directed learning when needed. While Cheryl expressed the need of clearer lead from the instructor, some other participants seemed pleased with chances to make decisions for their learning. Personal needs appeared to be a factor in teacher involvement. The disagreement between Vygotskian and Piagetian views of teacher guidance may not have a decisive answer, as it depends on individual learner variables and the dominant culture.

Conventional views of the teacher were apparent in the participants' responses, which might not be easily changed. In their perspectives, the instructor was a decision maker. The notion was evident when the participants were confused with and shocked by the assessment requirements and rubric, but did not ask about the reasons for changes to the final examination. It is understandable that their primary concern was how the changes would affect their work and scores. As to justification for the decision, it was the instructor's job. As Ken expressed, "My goal is to learn English well, and it's the teacher who gives the test." His statement reflected a culturally derived view of traditional student role (Lee, 2005). On the same note, Jenny stated that the teacher must have her own considerations in making the changes; the instructor was the leader who makes decisions for all, and as Cheryl argued, students had to comply with the decision. More explicitly, Cheryl asked for heavier teacher hand in shaping choices which were meant to offer them greater autonomy. The participants seemed unconsciously content with the traditional

learner role. This acceptance of traditional learner role may also explain why the participants offered fewer suggestions for improvement of assessment than responses to other questions.

Such culturally derived perspectives on teacher and learner roles could be in the way when teachers try to promote autonomy in their classrooms in a society overloaded with the traditional concept of teacher as provider or judge. As Hird (1995) suggested, “any changes to be effected in the development of a communicative approach with Chinese characteristics will need to be implemented slowly and with sensitivity” (p. 24). In addition, he noted that “educational change of any permanent consequence can be achieved only through culturally responsive reform” (p. 26). Hird’s view corresponds to Gipps’ (1999) argument regarding power relationship in the classroom.

While performance assessment has the potential to enhance learning, such an alternative form of assessment does not, of itself, alter power relationships (Gipps, 1999). Clearly in the participant responses, the instructor was perceived as holding the superior position of assigning scores, thus having power over students. Actually, although the instructor offered higher ownership, the students still had to play the assessment game with rules set by the instructor. Openness about design, constructs, and scoring will address fairness issues, but the development of openness in the classroom requires political will as assessment is a political act, Gipps concluded. Similarly, Shepard (2000) claimed that to accomplish an equitable classroom, educators have not only to make assessment more informative, more insightfully tied to learning steps, but at the same time must change the social meaning of evaluation.

Gipps (1999) also advocated an interpretivist approach in assessment. The Interpretivist viewpoint takes into consideration factors such as students’ perceptions of how testing affects them, student and teacher confidence in test results, and differences in student and teacher perceptions of the goals of assessment. According to Gipps, other knowledge about the student’s

personal backgrounds, class or group setting, the type of assessment, and how the students responded to the tasks may help the teacher interpret the test scores.

Implications for student-teacher relationship from the interpretivist approach point to the need of teachers sharing power with students rather than exerting power over them, if bringing the student into some ownership of the assessment process is a desired result. Even though the teacher and the students may not be equal partners since the teacher is an expert in the subject content, assessment can be group centered and between peers with shared standards and definitions of expected achievement. The above-described implications and practice suggested by Gipps (1999) make it possible for the classroom to become a self-evaluating organization. As Gipps further pointed out, among all the conditions involved to make assessment more equitable and support high-quality learning, teachers have to bring students into the process of assessment.

Assessment

Ideally assessment should be a measure linking teaching and learning. Whenever possible, it should function as an instructional activity so students are evaluated on what they normally do in real-world contexts (Norris, Brown, Hudson, & Yoshioka, 1998). Such authentic assessment mediates teaching and learning, and establishes new constructive relationship between the teacher and students. However, more often than not, instruction and assessment are conceived separate in time and purpose (Shepard, 2000). Even worse, as Palmer (1998) mourned, “We are distanced by a grading system that separates teachers from students” (p. 36).

Shepard (2000) proposed “an emergent, constructivist paradigm [of assessment] in which teachers’ close assessment of students’ understandings, feedback from peers, and student self-assessments would be a central part of the social processes that mediate the development of

intellectual abilities, construction of knowledge, and formation of students' identities" (p. 4). To make assessment more enlightening and to insightfully connecting to learning, the following assessment strategies have particular bearing on the present study:

On-going Assessment

Assessment is inevitably anxiety-provoking, because students pay more attention to the score itself than the meaning implied by the score in terms of learning due to the social and cultural influences (Black & Wiliam, 2001; Gipps, 1999). Perhaps the best way to deal with test anxiety is to make the test not a test, like what Dick proposed. He suggested arranging the performance as regular assignment with short intervals in between, so the class would have more opportunities to practice the conversations in a more real-life situation and the stress would be reduced. His point was for the class to have constant practice, while, for the instructor, the assessment in daily-activity context would offer an authentic picture of how each student learned and what would be needed next. An assessment in this sense is more than testing; it is an integrated part in teaching and learning (Tompkins, 2002). Huerta-Macias (1995) pointed out benefits of such assessment: being non-intrusive while extending and reflecting the day-to-day classroom curriculum, providing information not only on learners' weaknesses, but also on their strengths, and multiculturally sensitive if well administered.

Feedback

"Good feedback causes thinking" (Black & Wiliam, 2003, p. 631). Some participants were aware that assessment was to inform learning and teaching. In addition to a score that determines their standing in the class, a few participants expected feedback from the audience. Jo and Ken used audience responses as reference to evaluate their performance and reflect on ways to improve. The participants did not mention feedback from the instructor, because they knew that as a normal

practice, summer vacation begins right after the final examination, and therefore, they usually only receive a report card showing their final grades from each course taken. Considering this, an additional benefit of ongoing assessment rests in that the students will likely have immediate feedback from the instructor.

Black and Wiliam (2003) suggested teachers give comment-only marking as a way to encourage students to focus on actual learning, while Shepard (2000) encouraged using indirect forms of feedback to maintain student motivation and self-confidence while not ignoring student errors. However, these are still not commonly used in Taiwan possibly due to various practical restrictions, despite the potential educational benefits.

Self-Assessment

Sadler (1989) stressed the significance of student self-assessment in that the learner continuously monitors product quality “*during the act of production itself* [original italics].” (p. 121) and be able to regulate the product in the process. As a consequence, student self-assessment enhances intellectual capacity; it also increases students’ accountability for their own learning, and facilitates collaborative relationship between teachers and students (Shepard, 2000). Self-assessment and reflection are important components in a truly informative assessment that helps students experience more success, rather than frustration in foreign language learning. However, these practices were not perceived by most of the participants.

Fairness

Fairness, a vital dimension of assessment, was mentioned a few times in the interviews. The participants talked about the scoring rubric favorably as they deemed it lucid and fair with scoring criteria clearly noted. Having this information, the participants were able to make personal decisions based on their own readiness level regarding the final examination. Shepard (2000)

argued that making explicit criteria available to the students has a twofold benefit: 1) it facilitates metacognitive awareness of important characteristics of the expected performance and it addresses not only the product one is trying to achieve but also the process of achieving it; 2) it assures a basic fairness principle and gives students the opportunity to get good at what the standards require, which satisfies an even more fundamental sense of fairness. Inferred from the argument, clear criteria does more than addressing fairness; it improves student self-assessment.

In addition to transparency of evaluation criteria, the participants upheld the choice feature of tiered performance tasks as it also endorsed fairness. Dick commented that an assessment offering choices addresses fairness, for “it is unfair to expect everybody to meet the same requirement.” The final examination under study had won the participants’ heart by making criteria accessible and by attending to individual differences.

On the other hand, uniform tests are not fair [統一以難的題目來要求每一個人，這樣很不公平], said Dick. Uniform tests have been based on the prevalent belief of fairness. The superficial fairness neglected the fact that every student is unique, like each of our ten fingers is different from the others. Expecting all students to meet the same requirements in the same condition is actually not fair; rather, it deprives the chance for students to grow on truly fair grounds.

A Broadened Assessment Approach

For integrated educational practice, researchers have repeatedly pointed out the need of joining the strengths of formative and summative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 2003; Gipps, 1999; Lynch, 2001). The tasks offered in this final examination were not all genuine performance tasks. The basic-level tasks of traditional summative nature elicited contradictory responses from the participants, enhancing verification of interpretation. The instructor in the present study

administered a two-part assessment, one on listening comprehension in paper-and-pen format, and one on speaking through tiered performance tasks. The combination of two types of information would provide an in-depth understanding of the students' learning. In addition, Gipps (1999) proposed a broadening of assessment approach to offer students alternative opportunities to demonstrate achievement.

Ongoing assessment, constructive feedback, self-assessment, fairness, and a broadened assessment approach are all important to educational assessment practice. Unfortunately, current assessment practice seldom includes all these components (Black & Wiliam, 2001, 2003). For assessment to meaningfully tie to learning, there is much to be changed in existing assessment practice. In the present study, fairness was inferred, thus promoting in the participants a higher level of motivation and confidence in the assessment as well as the instructor. Enhanced willingness to engage in tasks resulted in positive achievements. More importantly, the differentiated assessment, attending personal factors, aimed to encourage students to work toward the ultimate goal of English learning, which is being communicatively competent without neglecting or compromising either fluency or accuracy.

Limitations of the Study

Some limitations of this study were in the investigation method. Interviews and focus group discussions had to be conducted within limited time after final examination. Participants might have been anxious to finish the interview or discussion and thus were not fully engaged. As the researcher, I raised questions, but it was up to the participants to decide how to respond to the questions and in which direction the interviews or discussion would go. In turn, I further limited the study by making choices as to how far to follow up certain points the interviewees make. Besides, my own experience of teaching in EFL context for years may have bounded my openness to all

responses. The participants chose their own partners for various reasons; this was beyond my control, and was not investigated therefore, this was an additional limitation to this study. Findings of this case study with a small group of participants chosen in a purposeful way may be useful to understand similar situations, but not generalizable to a larger population. The study focused on only one case of implementation of one aspect of differentiated instruction; therefore, the conclusions may not apply to EFL curriculum in general.

Suggestions for Future Research

Just as an authentic assessment informs the teacher and students, this study has been a rewarding experience for me as a researcher. A better understanding of tiered performance tasks, the aspect of differentiated instruction examined here, shed light on how an assessment can be a source of insight and help both the educator and the learner, instead of an occasion for rewards and punishment. Some suggestions developed throughout the course of the study are offered, in the hope that more studies will join the search of constructive teaching and assessment:

1. The present study examined only one aspect of differentiated instruction—assessment—in relation to EFL learning and teaching, through the administering of only one strategy, tiered performance task, which naturally renders very limited knowledge of how differentiated instruction can be promising in an EFL context in general. Further investigation is needed to look at other aspects of differentiated instruction and employ other assessment strategies to better inform the potential of differentiated instruction in EFL practices.
2. Differentiated instruction celebrates learner differences in readiness, interests, learning profiles, and affective needs. In the present study, leveled tasks addressed learner

uniqueness in academic levels; future studies can focus on one or more other dimensions to develop knowledge of the approach.

3. Due to time constraints and availability, the present study was conducted in a college classroom with one final examination in an English Listening and Speaking class during a period of one and half months. Future inquiries could pursue differentiation in a longitudinal manner with multiple assessment experience and across classes to observe the influences of both tiered performance tasks and differentiated instruction more comprehensively.
4. Participants in the present study were students in technical and vocational higher education in Taiwan. Although the study findings were encouraging, more studies with participants of various natures (such as students in academic-oriented institutions), different age groups (such as elementary schools or junior high and high schools), and other EFL regions (such as Korea, Japan, Vietnam) will surely add deeper insight into the applicability of differentiated instruction in EFL contexts.
5. The focus of this study was learner perspectives. It will be equally important to seek greater input from the instructor, who was the center of the implementation of differentiated instruction and authentic assessment. Studies on teachers' perspectives, obstacles encountered and coping strategies have been scarce and therefore are recommended for the purposes of contrasting with, complimenting, or verifying student viewpoints.
6. Out of personal attachment to the field of EFL, I conducted the present study in an EFL classroom. However, the promise of differentiated instruction should not be

limited in the area under study; additional investigation regarding other disciplines is suggested to expand perspectives of the philosophy and instructional approach.

7. The nature of inquiry determines research approach. The present study was exploratory in nature, as a result, using the interpretivist paradigm to explore in-depth understanding of the participants' perspectives on tiered performance tasks. Studies with statistic measures will aid to derive a more integrated view of differentiated instruction and EFL learning and teaching.
8. Poorly designed standardized tests curtail teaching and learning by giving a score as the end. Researchers recommend educators to utilize constructive feedback and to encourage student self-assessment for improved assessment practice. More close examination should be conducted with regard to how these assessment strategies are employed in differentiated instruction and in tiered performance tasks to sustain positive educational approach.

Conclusion

Differentiated instruction honors each student's learning needs and strives to maximize every student's learning capacity. This principal tenet of differentiated instruction emphasizes the dual foci in a humanistic learner-centered curriculum—the learner and learning (Henson, 2003).

This study is a first-round effort of investigating the potential of differentiated instruction at the tertiary level in the EFL context in Taiwan. Using a qualitative case study, I was able to, as Yatvin (2004) describes, dip toes into the water of this introductory exploration of how differentiated instruction can be appropriately implemented to uplift English learning of Taiwanese college students.

The findings of this inquiry were encouraging and inspiring. Tiered performance tasks, an assessment strategy often employed in differentiated instruction, were examined through individual interviews and focus groups to seek the participants' perspectives on the authentic evaluation measure and the educational implications of the perspectives. The participants recognized tiered performance tasks as an innovative assessment strategy offering choices of leveled tasks to promote autonomy. Given the increased ownership, the participants developed strong motivation to take challenges, which caused some concerns as well. Yet, immense efforts were made to achieve self-directed goals and resulted in improved English skills and enhanced confidence. Appreciating greater ownership in learning, the participants generated an overall acceptance of tiered performance tasks and appreciated that individual differences were addressed.

Positive responses from the participants suggested that differentiated instruction, connecting to Confucian teaching in that both approaches attend to personal needs of the learner, is promising in a culturally sensitive EFL environment in the Chinese society in Taiwan. Enhanced motivation and increased effort were especially evident in low-achievers. The discovery is relevant in particular to English education in the technical and vocational education system as students in the systems generally demonstrate weak English proficiency and low motivation. Implications of the findings pointed to the needs of an authentic assessment to link teaching and learning, as well as an equitable relationship between the educator and the learner.

Brown and Hudson (1998) cautioned that performance assessments are relatively difficult to produce and relatively time-consuming to administer. Besides, reliability, validity, and test security may be problematic. Likewise, Shepard (2000) admitted that the abilities needed to implement authentic socio-constructivist assessment are daunting. However, such assessment

should be pursued because it holds the most promise for using assessment to improve teaching and learning.

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Appendix A

University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

University of New Orleans

University Committee for the Protection
of Human Subjects in Research
University of New Orleans

Form Number: 04apr07

(please refer to this number in all future correspondence concerning this protocol)

Principal Investigator: Richard Speaker
Yeh-uh Chen

Title: Associate professor
Graduate student

Department: Curriculum and Instruction

College: Education

Project Title: To differentiate or not to differentiate? Exploring influences of tiered performance tasks on perspectives and attitudes of college EEL students in Taiwan

Dates of Proposed Project Period From 5.1.2007 to 4.30.2008

Approval Status:

Full Board Review

Approved Date: 9-10-07

Expedite

Deferred Date:

Exempt

Disapproved Date:

Project requires review more than annually. Review every _____ months.

**approval is for 1 year from approval date only and may be renewed yearly.*

1st continuation Signature of IRB Chair

Date:

2nd continuation Signature of IRB Chair

Date:

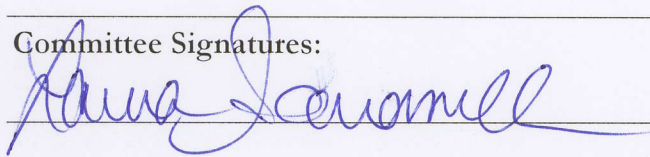
3rd continuation Signature of IRB Chair

Date:

4th continuation Signature of IRB Chair

Date:

Committee Signatures:



Laura Scaramella, Ph.D. (Chair)

James Evans, LCSW

Pamela Jenkins, Ph.D.

Isabelle Maret, Ph.D.

Ann O'Hanlon, Ph.D.

Richard B. Speaker, Ph.D.

Kari Walsh

Kathleen Whalen, LCSW

Appendix B

Listening and Speaking Final Examination Schedule, Task Descriptions, and Scoring Criteria

Listening and Speaking Final Examination

- For your Listening and Speaking final examination, you will be tested (1) listening (50 points), and (2) speaking (50 point).

- **Listening:**

Categories to Be Tested	Learning Materials to Get You Ready for the Test
True/False	<i>World Link</i> textbook and audio tracks <i>ABC Interactive English</i> (February and March)
Multiple Choice	
Yes/No	
Dictation	<i>World Link</i> online dictation exercises

- **Speaking:**

The speaking test of your final examination includes 2 projects and an optional project: The “Souvenir” project, the “Bad Habits” project, and the optional bonus project. In each project, the tasks are categorized as Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced. You are free to choose one level of the task that suits you the best from each project.

	Basic	Intermediate	Advanced
“Souvenir” Project	40%	45%	50%
“Bad Habits” Project	40%	45%	50%
Bonus Project	5%	10%	20%

* The maximum you can get from all the three projects are 100%.

- **Scoring criteria:**

Content (meet the requirement? accuracy?)	Pronunciation/Intonation	Fluency	Creativity	Gesture
40%	20%	20%	10%	10%

Wk	Date	Event	Workbook	Online Dictation & Quiz	<i>ABC Interactive English</i>
16	6/14	口語期中考排演 Rehearsal (Little Theater)	Unit 7 6/14 due	Unit 7 Dictation 6/12 due roadtosuccess2007-7d@yahoo.com.tw Final Conversation Script 6/18 due: roadtosuccess2007-finalscrip@yahoo.com.tw	Blue Week Quiz on 6/14
17	6/21	聽力期末考 Listening final exam 口語期末考 Speaking final exam	--	Unit 7 Dictation 6/19 due roadtosuccess2007-7q@yahoo.com.tw	--
18	6/28	聽力期末考 Listening final exam 口語期末考 Speaking final exam & Getting ready for the summer!	--	--	Green Week Quiz on 6/28

Task Descriptions

	Basic (40%)	Intermediate (45%)	Advanced (50%)
“Souvenir” Project	Do the Unit-5 conversation on p. 103 of the Video Course book.	Your partner is going to <u>one</u> of the places (Cape Town, Las Vegas, or Montreal). Use <u>all</u> of the information relevant to that city on p. 50 of WL Book 1. Apply all the information to the Unit-5 conversation on p. 103 of the Video Course book. (Minimum: 2 minutes)	Your foreign friend is going back to his/her hometown (Cape Town, Las Vegas, or Montreal). You are suggesting souvenirs to this friend to bring back to his/her hometown for his/her family/friends. Use <u>all</u> of the information relevant to that city on p. 50 of WL Book 1. <u>And</u> use <u>all</u> the “Giving Compliments” sentences for <i>Week 4</i> on p. 10 of the <i>ABC Interactive English March</i> issue. (Minimum: 2 minutes)
“Bad Habits” Project	Do the Unit-6 conversation on p.58 of the textbook.	Your friend has some bad habits that he wants to change/quit. He asks for your advice. You tell him what you think <u>and</u> also suggest him to join a club. Use the “bad habits” and “bad qualities” information on pages 74 and 70. Also use/modify the conversation on page 58. (Minimum: 2 minutes)	<u>In addition to all the requirements for the intermediate-level task</u> , you also need to use <u>all</u> the Useful Expressions (8) on pages 46 and 54. (Minimum: 2 minutes)
Bonus Project	Recite the conversation on page 32 <u>or</u> the one on page 33 of the <i>ABC Interactive English February</i> issue. (5%)	There are some useful sentences on page 10 of the <i>ABC Interactive English February</i> issue. You will <u>draw</u> one sentence under each week and have 20 minutes to work on the conversation performance that will include the 4 sentences you have drawn. (Minimum: 2 minutes) (10%)	<u>In addition to all the requirements for the intermediate-level task</u> , you also draw 3 phrases from pages 26-27 of the <i>ABC Interactive English February</i> issue. You have 20 minutes to work on the conversation performance that will include the 7 sentences or phrases you have drawn. (Minimum: 2 minutes) (20%)

Appendix C

Sample Task Products by Participants

“SOUVENIR” PROJECT

Another Souvenir?

(Scripts provided in textbook)

Basic-Level Task (40%)

Instruction: Do the Unit-5 conversation on p. 103 of the *World Link: Video Course* book.

- Mike: Roberto, why are you bringing a sweater to Mexico City? It's summer there, so it's really hot, right?
- Roberto: It's usually hot in the day but sometimes at night it gets chilly.
- Mike: Oh. Well, what about the business suit? Isn't it a vacation?
- Roberto: Yes and no. I have a big meeting on Tuesday, so I'm bringing the suit. But after Tuesday, it's vacation time!
- Mike: Who are all the gifts for?
- Roberto: Oh, my family lives in Mexico City so I'm bringing them some souvenirs from New York.
- Mike: And who's the book for?
- Roberto: It's for Maria, my niece. She's ten years old.
- Mike: Ten? You should get her something more fun—like a video game!
- Roberto: Maria is young, but she loves books. She's really smart.
Huh. What about this? Is this hers too?
- Roberto: Oh that? That belongs to my Dad. It's a souvenir from his New York visit, but he forgot it. Do you think I should get him another present?
- Mike: Well, that already belongs to him. Hey, you should get him a New York T-shirt or maybe a Yankees cap?
- Roberto: Good idea. I can get that at the airport. That's it.
- Mike: Do you have your plane ticket and passport?
- Roberto: Yes. And I have my hotel information, my car rental information...my camera's in my briefcase...

Mike: (holding stuffed toy) Hey, whose is this? Another souvenir?

Roberto: Umm...no...it's mine.

Mike: It's yours?

Roberto: It was a good-luck present from Claudia. I always travel with it.

Mike: Ah...don't be embarrassed. He's very cute. (Laughing) And I'm sure he makes a great travel partner!

“SOUVENIR” PROJECT

Prepared and performed by participants Cheryl & Lily

Intermediate-Level task (45%)

Instruction: Your partner is going to one of the places (Cape Town, Las Vegas, or Montreal). Use all of the information relevant to that city on p. 50 of World Link Book 1. Apply all the information to the Unit-5 conversation Use information relevant to a certain city on p. 103 of the Video Course book. (Minimum: 2 minutes)

City information from *World Link Book 1*:
Las Vegas, USA

Weather:

- Sunny days; cool evenings all year
- In summer, it's 100°F /38C.

Activities:

- Casinos, great nightlife and restaurants
- Swimming pools and golf courses
- Beautiful mountains for hiking, and for skiing and snowboarding in winter

Cheryl: Lily, why are you bring jacket to Las Vegas? It's summer there, so it's hot, right?

Lily: It's usually **hot in the day, but cool in the evening.**

Cheryl: Oh, well, what about the dress? Isn't it a vacation?

Lily: Yes and no. My friend is getting married in Las Vegas. But after the wedding it's my vacation time.

Cheryl: Who are all gifts for?

Lily: Oh, my friends were Americans and most of them never been to Taiwan, so I bring some souvenir from Taiwan.

Cheryl: And who's the postcards for?

Lily: It's for Eunice, my friend's sister, she just like the sister of mine. She likes to collect things.

Cheryl: Like the sister of yours? You should get her something like Taiwanese lucky bag.

Lily: Sounds great, but Eunice likes to take pictures. I think she will like postcards.

Cheryl: Huh, what about this? Is this hers, too?

Lily: Oh that? That belongs to my another friend John. It's a souvenir from his Taiwan visit, but he forgot it. Do you think I should get him another present?

Cheryl: Well, that already belongs to him. Hey, you should get him a kung fu shoe.

Lily: Good idea! I can get that at Lu-Kang, my cousin's shop.

Cheryl: Do you have your plane ticket and passport? I know you got the bad memory.

Lily: Yes. And I have my hotel information, my house key, my money, uh... well where is my camera? Oh it's in my suitcase. Haha.

Cheryl: Hey! Whose is this? Another souvenir?

Lily: Umm...no...it's mine.

Cheryl: It's yours?

Lily: It was a pillow since I was little. I always sleep with it every night.

Cheryl: Ah...don't be embarrassed. It's useful... And I'm sure it makes you have a great dream.

“SOUVENIR” PROJECT

Prepared and performed by participants Alex & Ken

Advanced-Level Task (50%)

Instruction: Your foreign friend is going back to his/her hometown (Cape Town, Las Vegas, or Montreal). You are suggesting souvenirs to this friend to bring back to his/her hometown for his family/friends. Use all of the information relevant to that city on p. 50 of World Link Book 1. And use all the “Giving Compliments” sentences for Week 4 on p. 10 of the *ABC Interactive English*, March issue.

City information from *World Link Book 1*:
Montreal, Canada

Weather:

- It’s hot and humid in summer.
- It’s about 23°F /-5°C in winter.
- Spring and autumn are nice.

Activities:

- Skiing is popular in winter.
- In spring and summer, Mont Royal Park is great for hiking and cycling.
- Relaxing cafés and hip nightclubs—often compared to Paris.

Sentences from *ABC Interactive English March issue*:
“Giving Compliments”

- Taiwan is a very beautiful country.
- The people are so friendly.
- The food tastes great.
- I love the weather here.
- There’s so much to do!
- The culture is very interesting.

Ken: Hey! Alex, why did you come to Taiwan in particular?

Alex: Because I think **Taiwan is a very beautiful country.**

Ken: It is eight days since you came to Taiwan. What do you think about the people here?

Alex: **The people are so friendly.** But it’s too bad that I have to get back to Canada after few days later. It’s really too bad.

Ken: Don’t be so sad. Next time you can visit to Taiwan again. By the way, **the food tastes great here.**

Alex: I haven't eaten all of Taiwan's famous snacks yet. I heard someone said Danshui Fisherman's Wharf has a lot of delicious sea food to eat and **there is so much to do**.

Ken: Wow! Your observation is so elaborative. Can you tell me more? How about the weather?

Alex: I think Taiwan is not as hot as like imagination. **I love the weather here**. And Taiwan's festivals and activities are not less than our country. **The culture is very interesting** for me.

Ken: I think *Montreal* is also great. I love the *weather in spring and autumn* there. And I like to *go hiking and go cycling in Mont Royal Park*.

Alex: Wow! How enjoyable you are!

Ken: The travel is going to be done. Don't you want to buy any souvenir? For example, like condom. There are many special styles in Taiwan.

Alex: No, I don't what to buy that. I bought some meaningful souvenirs. It's secret.

Ken: Uh, all right. And you can buy some local thing which you won't find in other country.

Alex: Can you give me some suggestions?

Ken: For example, you can buy some artistic productions, or recipe of Taiwan snack. It symbolizes special masterpiece of Taiwan.

Alex: Yeah, that's great idea. I accept your best idea.

Ken: It's piece of cake. Because I am Taiwanese, I know Taiwan culture more than you.

Alex: Ha. I think if I buy some art, my mom will be exciting. She is very like Chinese art.

Ken: OK! Let's go to buy some souvenirs and go home to pack your luggage.

Appendix D

Invitation Letter to Students

INVITATION LETTER TO STUDENTS

Dear student:

My name is Yeh-uh Hsueh Chen, a graduate student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of New Orleans. I am now in the process of collecting data to complete my doctoral dissertation research for my Ph.D. degree. The study is titled “To differentiate or not to differentiate? Exploring influences of tiered performance tasks on perspectives and attitudes of college EFL students in Taiwan.” Your participation in the study will be much appreciated.

By agreeing to participate in the study, you allow me to proceed with the following:

- Observing in your Freshmen English Listening and Speaking Practices class weekly till the end of the semester.
- Videotaping activities in the above-mentioned class.
- Interviews with selected students individually or in small groups; you may be one of them. If you do not take part in the interviews or small group discussions, video recoding of whatever you say or do will not be included in the report of findings.
- Collecting and analyzing artifacts related to assessment in the Freshmen English Listening and Speaking Practices class, including final examination rubric, class pictures, teaching materials, and emails.
- Discussion with your teacher regarding assessments in the subject class.

Participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without consequence. Your grades in the course will not be affected in any way whether you choose to participate in the study or not. The information you share will be used for educational purposes only and kept confidential. The attached consent form explains the study in greater detail. If you choose to participate, please sign the consent form in the area indicated and return it to me. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Yeh-uh Hsueh Chen
Graduate student,
The University of New Orleans

Appendix E

Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Study

To differentiate or not to differentiate? Exploring influences of tiered performance tasks on perspectives and attitudes of college EFL students in Taiwan.

Project Director & Principal Investigator

Project Director: Yeh-uh Hsueh Chen

Doctoral student, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

University of New Orleans

E-mail: yhchen1@uno.edu

Tel: 504-280-6605

04-711-1111 ext. 3713

Principal investigator (Advisor): Richard B. Speaker, Ph.D.

Associate Professor, Curriculum and Instruction

University of New Orleans

E-mail: rspeaker@uno.edu

Tel: 504-280-6534

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to explore the applicability of differentiated instruction in college EFL classrooms in Taiwan, in particular the potential influences of tiered performance tasks on student perspectives of English learning.

Procedures Used for This Research

There will be 6-8 weekly in-class observations, each recorded with field notes and videotaping. It is also intended to conduct 3-4 individual interviews and 2-3 focus group interviews with selected students. Interviews will be audio-taped and verbatim transcribed for analysis. If deemed necessary, emails will be used to communicate with interviewees for follow-up questions, clarification, and member checks. In addition, documents/artifacts such as final examination rubric, class pictures, and teaching materials will be provided by the instructor to highlight course objectives. All collected data, including notes, interview audiotapes, transcripts, video recording of class activities, and documents/artifacts, will be kept and reviewed for the sole purpose of analysis to gain insight into the participants' experiences.

Potential Risks of Discomfort

There are no potential risks of discomfort other than those normally found in an English classroom. Participants are encouraged to take part in the class activities and do their best in the assessments. Besides, confidentiality of individual and focus group interviewees will be securely guarded. If you have any concern related to participation or wish to discuss any discomfort you may experience, please contact the Project Director listed on this form.

Potential Benefit to You or Others

The participants will have opportunities to experience a new format of assessment and exercise autonomy in choosing the tasks they prefer. By providing the researcher information, the participants will increase their understanding of the assessments, the choices they are able to make, and their perspectives of the relationships between their learning and the assessments. In the future, this research can be examined by teachers who are designing assessments in their English teaching.

Alternative Procedures

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw consent and terminate participation at any time without consequence.

Protection of Confidentiality

All data collected will be assigned a coded number and pseudonyms will be in place of any student name. Information obtained will only be accessible to the Project Director. Participant identities will remain anonymous in the reporting of all data. In case of any concern or problem, please feel free to contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Richard B. Speaker listed above or chair of The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the address below:

Dr. Laura Scaramella, Chair
The Institutional Review Board
University of New Orleans
Department of Psychology, GP2001
New Orleans, LA 70148
Email: lscaram@uno.edu
Tel: 504-280-7481

Signatures

I have been fully informed of the procedures described above with possible benefits and risks. My signature indicates that I have given the above-mentioned researchers

permission to use the data provided since May 2007 and any further information I may offer till the completion of this study.

Name of participant (student) Print

Signature of participant (student)

Date

Yeh-uh H. Chen

Name of person obtaining consent Print

Signature of person obtaining consent

Date

Appendix F

Interview Protocol

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. How do you describe yourself as a student in this department? (background)
2. Tell me what performance tasks you chose to do in the recent final examination for this class. (experience and behavior)
3. How did you make choices of the tasks for yourself? (experience and behavior)
4. How do you feel about the assessment? (feeling)
5. What part of the assessment do you like? What part of it don't you like? (sensory/feeling)
6. What differences did you notice between the final examination and the other quizzes in this class? (experience and behavior/sensory)
7. What reasons did your teacher tell you about why she is doing assessment in this way? (knowledge/sensory)
8. How do you think the assessment should be conducted in a different way? (opinions and values)
9. How do the leveled performance tasks affect your leaning in the class? (opinions and values)

Appendix G

Focus Group Discussion Moderator's Guide

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION MODERATOR'S GUIDE

Time:

Place:

Participants:

1. Introduction

Welcome

Welcome and thank you for coming to this discussion. Each of you is invited to participate because your point of view is important to my study of tiered performance tasks for effective English teaching, learning, and assessment. I greatly appreciate your contribution to this study. This group discussion is not a test; therefore there is no right or wrong answers to each question.

I am very interested in what you think and feel, and I believe everyone here does the same. We want to know about your personal experience, insight and opinions on how assessment affects your English learning.

Purpose

The purpose of this focus group discussion is to share your experience and ideas of the recent final examination in Freshmen English Listening and Speaking Practices class. By discussing your experience of the unconventional evaluation, you will increase understanding of the assessments, the choices you were able to make, and perspectives of the relationships between your own English learning and the assessments. In the future, this research can be examined by teachers who are designing assessments in their English teaching.

2. Warm up

Reassuring Confidentiality

Before we start, I'd like to assure you that there is no need to concern with the audio recording. The recording is to help me keep record of what's said in this discussion. I will transcribe the discussion word by word, type it up and analyze the meaning or themes that come up, and then use the findings in my dissertation.

Your confidentiality is safeguarded and your grades in this class of Freshmen English Listening and Speaking Practices will not be affected in any way. I will make up a false name for each of you, so your real name will not appear in the transcripts, and I will not disclose the name and location of this school to further protect your identities. After the transcription is completed, the recording will be kept in a locked drawer, to which I am the only one who has access, and I will delete the recording in a few years. These measures are to make sure that nobody, except you and me who are present here, will know what you say in this discussion. I would also like to remind you that confidentiality can not be completely sheltered without your cooperation in keeping what we discuss in this room. Therefore, please do not discuss whatever talked about in this group with anyone else who is not here with us. As such, I believe you can feel free expressing yourself about the topic we will be discussing in a moment.

Guidelines

There are a few guidelines I would like to ask you to follow during the discussion:

1. You do not need to speak in any particular order. When you have something to say, please do so.
2. Please do not speak when someone else is talking. Sometimes, the discussion gets emotional, and it is easy to “jump in” while someone is still talking. But, please keep yourself from doing that.
3. It is important that we obtain the point of view of each one of you, so please participate in the discussion actively and freely. It’s Okay to repeat an opinion someone else has talked about, if you feel the same. There may be times that you are asked to elaborate or to clarify your opinion when necessary, do not feel offended when it happens.
4. You do not need to agree with what others in the group say, but you do need to state your point of view without making any negative comments. Let’s keep the discussion going peacefully. OK?
5. Because we have limited time together, I may need to stop you and to redirect our discussion. Here is a stop signal. We may or may not need it. But if I do this, you know it’s time to stop.
6. Please make sure your cell phone is turned off while the discussion is proceeding.

3. Clarification of terms

1. Grading: the practice of giving grades to make an end-point judgment about students’ achievement.
2. Assessment: gathering information about students’ achievement for the purpose of making instructional decisions. It is used as a part of instruction to support and enhance learning.
3. Tiered performance task: tasks with adjusted degree of difficulty to match a student’s current readiness level. To tier a performance task, the instructor considers instructional objectives, student readiness range, and the complexity level of that starting-point task, and then develops multiple versions of the task at different levels of difficulty, ranging from basic to advanced.

4. Establish easy and non-threatening questions

1. How do you describe yourself as a student in this department? (background)
2. Tell me what performance tasks you chose to do in the recent final examination for this class. (experience and behavior)
3. How did you make choices of the tasks for yourself? (experience and behavior)
4. How do you feel about the assessment? (feeling)

5. Establish more difficult questions.

5. What part of the assessment do you like? What part of it don’t you like? (sensory/feeling)
6. What differences did you notice between the final examination and the other quizzes in

- this class? (experience and behavior/sensory)
7. What reasons did your teacher tell you why she is doing assessment in this way? (knowledge/sensory)
 8. How do you think the assessment should be conducted in a different way? (opinion and values)
 9. How do the leveled performance tasks affect your learning in the class? (opinion and values)

6. Wrap-up

Summary

Asking for addition to summary

7. Member check

Identifying key discussion points

Checking general ideas of discussion

8. Closing statements

A reminder of confidentiality

As we come to a close, I need to remind you that the audiotape will be transcribed; you will be assigned false names for the purpose of transcript and data analysis so that you will remain anonymous, and then the tape will be destroyed.

I also ask you that avoid discussing the comments of group members and that you respect the right of each member to remain anonymous.

Final clarification

Are there any questions I can answer?

Expressing appreciation

Thank you for your contribution to this project. This was a very successful group discussion and your responses will be a great asset to my study. Again, I thank you for your participation.

Appendix H

Sample Interview Transcript

Individual interview with Lily

(I: interviewer; L: Lily)

I: 謝謝你接受我的訪問，由於你們班這次的考試方式比較與眾不同，跟以前的考試經驗都不一樣，我對這個特別有興趣，所以想請你談一談，你對這次考試的看法以及感覺。

L: 對這次考試的感覺啊，是有點與眾不同啦，沒考過這樣的試，可是我覺得還蠻不錯的。因為沒有說很難。聽寫沒有很難，可是有一部分，好像是第二大題，要寫人名的部分，有些人不會拼。有點難。

I: 那個是聽寫，就是今天在教室考的那一部份，對不對？那演出的部分呢？

L: 這個演出我覺得少了一點東西。因為，演出是演出，但就是少了一點，因為很少人在看，聽一聽，老師考一考，這樣而已。

I: 你的意思是說沒有真正在表演的感覺？

L: 對對，好像祇是給老師看而已，因為大家都在做自己的事，沒什麼人在聽。

I: 那以前的考試？

L: 之前我們在教室考的時候，因為是比較小的教室，大家彼此講話不太用力，都聽得到，有一點「觀眾」的感覺。可是這間教室太大，大家都離得很遠，覺得都在做自己的事，沒什麼觀眾的感覺。唸出來好像在應付老師。

I: 所以好像沒什麼成就感？

L: 對，只是舞台大了點，比較好用。

I: 以我過去的經驗，我覺得大部分的考試，像對話或演出，頂多只要準備一個，但是這次你們一個人要做好幾個〔題目〕？

L: 我覺得老師是有考慮到每個人的程度不同，我們班的程度差距很大，所以老師做了基本、中等和高級的題目，讓我們自己選。

I: 老師有跟你們這麼說過嗎？

L: 沒有，不過我覺得我們班有中階和高階能力的同學，想得到比較高的分數，就會去挑戰它，這樣他們比較會進步。

I: 你自己呢？你選什麼？總共考幾個？

L：我選中等〔笑〕。我考三個，有一個是高階的。

I：你為什麼做這樣的決定？

L：因為做 basic 的話，就是照課本練，照課本有點難背，自己做的對話比較好背，我們之前也是自己寫對話，自己背自己寫的，比較順。

I：我看過你們的課本，好像不少同學做 basic 的對話？

L：因為那個不用傷腦筋，背一背就行了。若是中級的，老師會叫你套幾個 video course 的東西；另外，像高階的部分，例如 A 同學是從國外來的，他要帶禮物回國，編個對話，有點難；我選中等的，我把 video course 的東西套進我跟我同學的想法就可以了。

I：你的意思是有個架構在，但不拘泥裡面的內容，可以做點變化，但又不用太花腦筋？

L：對。

I：那麼，為什麼另一個選高階的？

L：那一個高階的對話比較有挑戰力，老師給我們幾句從英文雜誌挑出來的句子，然後編寫成一個簡單的對話就好了。

I：你覺得這樣的考試，是否真的可以讓你發揮，是否適合自己的程度？

L：有發揮啊，通常我跟我同學的對話都是我編的，如果他覺得他的部分可以，我們就用；如果他覺得不順，我們就會討論、再編一次。那程度的部分，其實我想選高級的，可是我同學覺得太傷腦筋，他會背不起來，所以才選中等。我覺得選高等的比較有挑戰性。

I：我相信你的程度不錯，也給自己不小的期望？

L：嗯，我媽說，不要給輸大四的學姊〔笑〕。你有看過一個學姊嗎？皮膚小麥色，頭髮捲捲的，穿藍色細肩帶的，我覺得她發音不錯，也滿有自信的。

I：你期望你將來也能如此？

L：我期許我學到道地的英文，我不想有台灣腔調的英文，有些補習班的老師以前學的英文有台灣腔調，教出來的學生也這樣，台灣缺少外籍老師到校教英文。

I：你感覺系上外籍師資嫌少了些？

L：對啊！兩個而已。

I：不過，你們老師的英文很好啊！

L：對，很好，但有些老師的腔調還是不一樣。因為有些老師會去國外進修，所以腔調會變；但有些老師〔始終呆在本土〕可能習慣了她原有的腔調，所以變不了。我很喜歡聽 ICRT，每次聽到道地的英文腔調，我就很羨慕，要是有一天，我也可以講得這麼道地該多好！

I：回到今天的考試，你覺得老師給的考題合理嗎？你當時聽到老師說這次的考試形式跟以前不一樣，有很多種選擇，你的第一個反應是什麼？

L：其實，沒什麼合不合理，我覺得都可以，因為如果考的跟平常一樣，我會覺得這個老師沒準備；我記得上學期，聽力部分考的是老師自己找的，我認為還不錯；可是有同學反應太難了，因為沒聽過。可是我覺得這才有挑戰性，老師會找類似、不完全相同的考題，我覺得還不錯。

I：考題就是要有些熟悉度、但又不完全一樣，有變化？

L：對，之前聽一個同學說過，她參加初級英檢，她買坊間的參考書，結果聽的錄音帶和考試的腔調不同，她聽不懂。我覺得訓練聽力就是要適應不同人的腔調。

I：嗯，你覺得班上像你這樣的同學多嗎？

L：應該會有一些，可是大多數同學可能只求能過關，因為我們班還蠻愛玩的，成績好的就是那幾個。我個人則是不甘心輸給別人，我會有要超越別人的感覺。可是，也有些同學覺得在我們學校學不到東西。

I：你們這個課是聽講練習，但大家的重點好像多放在聽力上面？

L：也有注重口語的，老師上課會用遊戲，讓我們分組對話。但是我們講的感覺很少，因為我覺得我們班同學都太依賴中文了。我知道有些學校有「英文週」，我希望我們學校也有，全系講英文，訓練學生多講英文，才有勇氣面對外國人。

I：我知道你們老師對你們「說」的部分蠻下工夫的，你覺得你在這方面跟上學期剛進來的狀況比較起來有差別嗎？

L：我覺得沒差。因為上學期大家剛進來，會比較積極；下學期就比較混了，包括我自己，上學期上課前我會預習，可是這學期我沒有〔笑〕。

I：你覺得有沒有預習有差別嗎？

L：有，有預習的話，不只知道老師在說哪裡，我也會自己補充一些東西，譬如說用英英字典查類似的單字，我也可以回答老師的問題；我希望全班同學可以一起回答，但人數太少，或只有我一個回答，老師有時候會不高興，但全班同學都不積極、團結的話，很難改變大家。

I：你覺得這是個性因素還是對英文沒興趣？

L：就我所知我們班大多同學以前是唸高商，考四技的時候跨考，因為商科分數太高進不去，就選擇來分數低一點的應用外語系。例如我有同學對經濟學很有興趣，而他們選擇應外，可能將來想做國貿，把貿易和英文結合；我們二年級還會學日文，三年級可以選修法語，這樣可以邁向「國際化」。

I：除了老師上課有趣、會提供不同的內容供大家學習以外，你覺得不同的考試方式對學習是否有影響？

L：我覺得這樣的方式是好的，因為有聽力、有口語練習，不像傳統的台灣考試，只著重在寫；如果像傳統的教育，只是寫考卷、考文法，就像大家說的，台灣學生是「考試的機器」，考試的文法很好，但是說不出來、聽不懂，有什麼用？

I：你自己在聽和說的能力哪方面比較強？

L：聽的方面，因為說的方面我有時候還是會膽怯。

I：是因為說的機會比較少嗎？

L：嗯。

I：那你覺得這次的考試方式會不會讓你多做準備、練習？

L：會，會注重口語。像我在家的時候，我媽會逼我看電影，像 HBO，她很希望我多學習外國人的腔調；我自己開車上學時，媽媽也叫我聽 ICRT，她也聽得懂一點英文，但年紀大了學起來很困難，所以她希望我趁年輕多學一點，以後說不定可以找更好的工作。

I：妳媽媽很注重妳的教育，也很支持妳？

L：我媽很希望我和我弟弟往外語方面發展，以後不論做生意，或做其他方面工作都有幫助。我從國中開始學英文，她也陪著我學，到現在快五十歲了，她一直讀得很累。

I：妳覺得這次聽講的考試方式跟以前傳統的紙筆測驗，對妳記生字和口語表達的能力，哪種方式比較有幫助？

L：記單字部分，我會音標，知道讀音後，我就會知道怎麼寫；口語溝通部分我不知道該怎麼練習，在家時我聽不太懂我媽說什麼，所以不會跟我媽或我家人練習，但是放假時我會去找英文補習班，找有保障的、又有外籍老師的補習班。補習班會幫妳分 level，不同 level 有不同的老師負責，妳會聽到不一樣的發音，同學間也會有互動，對話會進步比較多，聽力也有幫助。這次考試對學習單字和口語都很有幫助，因為當我在編寫對話時，我需要單字的補助；但當我不知道如何念時，我便會去查字典來幫助，在這練習當中我會反覆的練習，這樣一來對我的單字和口語方面都很有幫助。

I：英聽期中考時不也要編寫嗎？那時編寫對話稿（沒分三個層次）對學習單字及口語能力和這次期末考（分三層次）比起來有何不同？

L：老實說我沒想過耶，雖然沒有分層次，但是老師也會給我們一個情境讓我們編對話。這樣一來，我們也是需要課本的單字及自己添加的單字，就像之前講的一樣。其實對我來說期中考及期末考沒啥兩樣。

I：妳認為上課還是要分 level，依程度來教？

L：嗯，依程度來教跟學，才不會太吃力，跟程度相當的同學一起學效果也比較好。像我們班有些人認為我講的英文有點快，他們聽不懂，他們需要一個一個字慢慢練。但是不論出國或現在就碰到一個外國人，不可能請他們一個一個字慢慢講，所以我告訴同學要常聽、常看，就可以多學一點。我不是覺得自己比較好，只是覺得大家沒有達到應外系應有的程度而已。

I：妳覺得你們老師這次分 level 的考試，對你們的幫助或影響在哪裡？

L：我覺得老師分兩個級數就好，不要 basic，basic 只是背課本，沒意義，同學也會比較認真的去思考。可能有同學覺得自己程度不好，但是從國中、高中到大學，一定有相當的程度，妳不可能停留在國小的程度。而且，目前學的對話，國中的單字也可以用得上啊！只有中、高級，會強迫同學去思考如何對話，不能因為懶得想，只做 basic 的。如果一年級就這樣練習，到了二、三、四年級，上外籍老師的課，聽得比較不吃力。

I：妳是說，因為大家已經有相當的基礎，如果老師再給一些壓力的話，會幫助大家往上提升？

L：我是這麼覺得。

I：那麼，有些同學還不到中、高級的程度，若用 basic 的方式來考試，對他們的學習會不會有不好的影響？

L：我覺得他們會依賴課本內容。我以前有碰到過一個日本老先生，他只會照課本說“*How are you? I'm fine, how about you?*”〔笑〕。要跟我對話時，還要我等一下，

去翻書找到要講的話，才能開始說。同學們如果依賴 basic 的〔學習模式〕，就會給我這樣的感覺。

I：妳是說應該先學習、吸收，再用自己的話講出來？

L：對。而且，之前我學習英文的經驗不好，我學得很痛苦。因為我要先在腦中想好每個單字，再把他們套進一個句子中轉成英文說出來，這樣太吃力了。後來有人教，才慢慢學會用英文，而不是用中文思考。也就是說，學英文要能真正吸收，讓那東西在腦海裡成形，才可以自然地應用出來。

I：妳會顧慮文法是否正確嗎？

L：有時候會，但老師告訴過我，口語是沒有文法可言的。

I：是現在的老師告訴妳的？

L：以前的老師和媽媽的老師都說過口語不用太顧慮文法。例如跟一些黑人講話，他們講話沒有文法〔笑〕，嗯，應該是說沒有很講究正式的文法。他們還常有一些連音或比較俚俗的用法。而且，他們有時候知道怎麼講，可是不會拼字〔笑〕。

I：妳常有機會接觸外國人？

L：因為我去過國外的社區大學讀書，我在美國西雅圖待過一年多，後來因為媽媽身體不舒服，弟弟又要上大學才回來。

I：待在國外一年多，對妳的英文有幫助嗎？

L：有，像我說的用英文思考，就是在那裡學的。而且我以前很害羞，但是在那裡誰都不認識，所以我有勇氣，我決定一定要講，就豁出去了，我的個性也變得不一樣了。

I：妳是怎樣的情況進社區大學？用學生簽證？

L：我用學生護照，先進他們的語言學校，再考托福，轉去社區大學。

I：再回想一下這次的考試，聽和講的部分，妳比較喜歡哪個部分？不喜歡哪個部分？

L：不會不滿意，只是有些小缺點，像對話可以不只兩個人，很多人加入較有挑戰性。像演短劇的方式，這個教室大，很適合，還可以加上一些道具，應該會有不錯的效果。表演給大家看，希望觀眾要看，不只是為了考試，也有一些樂趣，這樣老師比較好評分。

I：這樣可能沒辦法依同學的程度和興趣挑所要表現的內容？

L：沒錯，這是我的建議而已啦。至於聽力部分，因為這次考的範圍都是以前 ABC 的內容，老師可以試著去找相關類似的題目，雖然老師、學生辛苦一點，但是可以讓我假日讀些書，不要一直上網、看電視，或是逛街。

I：聽起來妳是一個勇於接受挑戰的學生？

L：我希望不要太侷限於課本的內容，對話就是該有互動，豐富內容。我覺得學英文就是一種樂趣〔笑〕。

I：我想到一個問題：口語部分每個同學選不同程度的題目考試，這樣的話，評分能夠公平合理嗎？

L：老師有說過，例如發音、文法各佔多少比例。像文法部分，我們考前要先寄 script 給她，她會先看文法的部分，給個分數，再看我們的發音評分。演得精不精采，也會給個分數。

I：我的意思是針對三個等級給的分數可能不一樣，適當嗎？

L：我覺得很不錯，因為老師已經給我們機會選擇了，我還挺滿意這個部分的。每個等級有每個等級的分數，老師有給我們看過，讓我們自己做決定，很民主啊！

I：妳有被尊重的感覺？

L：對，我們互相尊重〔笑〕。

Vita

Yeh-uh Hsueh Chen grew up in Taiwan and graduated from the National Chengchi University with a B.A. in Western Languages and Literature in 1980. She earned a M.Ed. in Special Education from the State University of New York at Binghamton in 1988. After working in various fields in the United States for almost ten years, she returned to Taiwan and started teaching English to learners at diverse levels, which has become her career. In August 2005 she embarked an unforgettable academic journey at the University of New Orleans (UNO). Her doctoral program had been marked with some uncommon experiences, including evacuation from New Orleans for Hurricane Katrina, displacement in Houston, living in FEMA trailer, and most importantly, an enlightening scholarly quest under incredible guidance of the faculty members in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. She was awarded a Ph.D. degree in Curriculum and Instruction with a specialization in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in December, 2007. Afterwards, she resumed instruction of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at Chienkuo Technology University in Taiwan.