CELE’s OPI Training System

Valerie Hansford, Asia University

INTRODUCTION

The Center for English Language Education’s (CELE’s) Oral Placement Interview (OPI) training system was developed in 2000 to train Asia University’s (AU’s) Visiting Faculty Members (VFM)s to conduct OPIs during the 2001 CELE Oral Proficiency Interview and Placement Process. Both the OPI training, and the OPI system itself have continued each year since 2001. The CELE OPI training generally occurs during the March Orientation Period and its format is based on the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) OPI (Oral Proficiency Interview) Training.

KEY POINTS OF THE ACTFL OPI TRAINING

As described on the ACTFL website (http://www.actfl.org), its OPI Familiarization Workshop includes the following points: “an introduction to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, ACTFL Rating Scale, and the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview. Participants observe and rate live demonstration interviews by the trainer. They discuss the implications of proficiency for academic and professional purposes.”

KEY POINTS OF THE CELE OPI TRAINING

The CELE OPI Training follows the basic format of the ACTFL OPI Familiarization Workshop. The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, the CELE-adapted OPI Rating Scale, the CELE Oral Proficiency Interview format, which includes many elements of the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview, as well as the logistics of the CELE Oral Proficiency Interview and Placement Process, are introduced during the training. Additionally, videotaped Oral Proficiency Interviews are observed and proficiency levels of interviewed students are assessed.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CELE OPI TRAINING

In the 2000 school year, CELE chose as an official project researching and developing an OPI system for CELE. Richard Wilson (Assessment Committee Chair for 2000) and Valerie Hansford (Curriculum Committee member for 2000) took responsibility for this project. While the OPI system was under development, it became apparent that a system to train CELE VFM’s in the OPI system was needed. As a result the OPI team also took
responsibility to develop the CELE OPI training system while developing the CELE OPI system.

It was determined that it would be helpful in the training to have video clips of the CELE-adapted OPI style as well as examples of students at different proficiency levels. As it was impossible to show recordings of actual interviews of incoming freshman students, it was felt that having volunteers from the 2000 school year Freshman English (FE) classes participate in videotaped interviews would serve the purpose. Next a breakdown of 2000 FE class levels based on the ACTFL guidelines was determined. Upon completing that breakdown, volunteers from each of those ranges were found and scheduled for interviews.

The videotaped interviews were conducted on the two days that were officially designated for make-up classes in January of 2001. The OPI team then watched the interviews together and assessed each interviewee’s proficiency level. These clips were edited onto a master VHS cassette for use in the training, to show samples of each of the proficiency levels and for the participants of the training (VFM) to learn how to assess student proficiencies based on the ACTFL guidelines.

Next the OPI team determined the training objectives, and planned a full day of training to be conducted during the orientation of VFM for the 2001-2002 academic year. Additionally, a 21-page training packet was developed.

CELE OPI TRAINING

The main objectives of the first training included: learning about the ACTFL proficiency guidelines, discussing students’ proficiency levels using a shared terminology, evaluating student proficiency levels using CELE-adapted ACTFL guidelines, and learning about the logistics of the CELE OPI system. The first CELE OPI training was held for one full day during the 2001 Orientation period (March-April) and was conducted by the OPI team (Richard Wilson—2001 Assessment Committee Chair and Valerie Hansford—2001 Professional Development Committee Chair-in-Training). The full day was divided into 4 different sessions. In the first session, VFM learned about the ACTFL proficiency guidelines and watch videotaped samples of proficiency levels. In the second session, VFM divided into small groups and in different rooms watched other videotaped OPI interviews and assessed students’ proficiency levels. For the third session, VFM re-grouped as a whole training group, compared assessments of students’ proficiency levels and tried to come to a shared assessment i.e. to calibrate assessments amongst VFM. In the fourth session, VFM created a list of points/areas to be aware of when assessing, learned about and how to conduct
the CELE oral interview, learned about points/areas to be aware of when interviewing, and learned the logistics of the 2001 CELE Oral Proficiency Interview and Placement Process.

REVISIONS TO THE CELE OPI TRAINING

Based on feedback from VFMs, changes made for the 2002 CELE Oral Proficiency Interview and Placement Process and the fact that most of the VFMs for the 2002 school year had been through the 2001 training, revisions were made to the CELE OPI Training. The basic objectives of the training remained the same but the focus changed to recalibrating proficiency assessments between VFMs to increase consistency, to introducing CELE-adapted sub-levels of proficiency, and to learning the logistics of the 2002 CELE Oral Proficiency Interview and Placement Process.

The OPI project team (Richard Wilson—2001 Assessment Committee Chair and Valerie Hansford—Professional Development Committee Chair), and Chris Koelbleitner—2002 Assessment Committee Chair led the 2002 OPI Training. The training was changed from one full day to two half-days to allow more time for the information to be processed. In the first session, VFMs learned the logistics of the 2002 CELE Oral Proficiency Interview and Placement Process, and were introduced to the 2001 results and resulting changes to the 2002 logistics including interview approaches, types of comments found beneficial to the OPI Placement Team, etc. In the second session of the first half-day, new VFMs learned about and returning VFMs reviewed the ACTFL proficiency guidelines, and watched a few new videotaped samples of proficiency levels and the new sub-levels. The next day was the second half-day of the training. For the third session and part of the fourth, VFMs watched more new videotaped OPIs and as a whole training group assessed and discussed students’ proficiency levels. In the finally part of the fourth session, VFMs created a list of points/areas to be aware of when assessing, and any final questions were addressed.

As the videos clips used in the 2001 training were obtained by interviewing students who had recently completed Freshman English, it was decided that the master CELE OPI Training tape needed to be updated. In this way the interviews of incoming freshman used in the training would be more realistic and more compatible with the objectives of the training. As a large component of the training involves the use of clips from videotaped OPIs and the previously mentioned video clips were not ideal, a new series of training videos, using sequences of interviews that included incoming freshman students (actual 2001 interviews) were developed. Alternate formats and approaches for interviews (collected from teachers), especially for the novice levels, were provided and discussed, to further assist in the fine-
tuning process. This decision was based on feedback from teachers at the lowest class levels that the interview format presented in the 2001 training was very challenging for the students they interviewed. The CELE OPI Training packet was revised reflecting the changes.

In 2003, there were more logistical changes (all logistical changes are discussed in the article called “CELE’s OPI System”) made for the 2003 CELE Oral Proficiency Interview and Placement Process so the 2003 OPI training focused more on dealing with the logistical changes. The trainers for the 2003 OPI training were Chris Koelbleitner—2003 Assessments Chair and Eric Gustavsen—2003 OPI Placement Team member. Valerie Hansford—2003 Professional Development Committee Chair and leader of the completed OPI Project assisted with the training.

At the time of writing this article, CELE has learned that there will be drastic changes to the 2004 CELE Oral Proficiency Interview and Placement Process, which will be reflected in the 2004 OPI Training.

CONCLUSION

Creating the CELE OPI Training System based on the format of the ACTFL OPI Familiarization Workshop has proved to be effective in training VFMs in conducting the CELE Oral Proficiency Interviews and Placement Process. In 2003, the Assessments Committee took responsibility for the CELE OPI Training System and for the CELE Oral Proficiency Interviews and Placement Process. The committee will continue to update and revise the CELE OPI Training System to reflect changes to the CELE Oral Proficiency Interviews and Placement Process and keep the training current with the needs of CELE.