

グローバルラーニングとコミュニケーション技能の育成： 静岡文化芸術大学 英語・中国語教育センター発足と運営についての初期報告

Fostering global learning and communication skills: A preliminary report on the founding and operations of a Language Education Center at Shizuoka University of Art and Culture

エドワード・サリッチ Edward SARICH
英語・中国語教育センター The English and Chinese Language Education Center

マーク D. シーハン Mark D. SHEEHAN
文化政策学部国際文化学科 Department of International Culture, Faculty of Cultural Policy and Management

高瀬 奈美 Nami TAKASE
英語・中国語教育センター The English and Chinese Language Education Center

ジャック・ライアン Jack RYAN
文化政策学部国際文化学科 Department of International Culture, Faculty of Cultural Policy and Management

本稿は、静岡文化芸術大学（SUAC）の英語・中国語教育センター（以後、センター）発足と運営に関する初期の報告である。センターに関連する詳細にふれる前に、大学における学生支援を目的とした言語教育センターの一般的役割を述べたあと、静岡文化芸術大学でセンターが発足するまでの経緯を説明する。特に確固たる教育的基盤を持つセンターを設立するに至った教育的理念を強調したい。さらに、実際に発足した2013年前期の運営にあたり、直面した課題などを示す。最後に、2013年4月から9月までの活動を報告し、次の展望を示したい。本稿は、センターの英語教育の部分のみに焦点をあてているが、中国語についての報告は、別途行うこととし、どのよう
にお互いの言語教育が協力しあい、補い発展していけるかは今後提示していきたい。

This article is a preliminary report on the establishment of an English and Chinese Language Education Center at Shizuoka University of Art and Culture (SUAC), (hereinafter referred to as the "Center"). Before discussing details related to the Center, information will be given on the general roles of language education centers in supporting student learning at the tertiary level; the actions taken to establish the Center at SUAC will then be explained. In particular, pedagogical steps taken to build a solid educational foundation for the Center will be highlighted. A discussion of Center operations and the challenges faced by teachers during the Center's inaugural semester in the spring of 2013 will follow. To conclude, information will be given on Center events and activities held from April to September 2013. Following that recap and commentary, future operational plans and a vision for the Center will be proposed. This preliminary report will focus on the English section of the Center. A separate study is planned to provide information on the Chinese section to illustrate how both language teams can collaborate and complement each other to provide educational support to members of the learning community at SUAC and beyond.

1.0 Language Education Centers in modern universities

In order to meet the demands of a global workplace, there now exists an imminent need to raise the level of general English communication skills among Japanese citizens and to provide students with opportunities to develop practical language skills that will assist them in their careers. Many universities are well aware of this need and have responded by offering students facilities that can better help them coordinate their studies. The English and Chinese Language Education Center at Shizuoka University of Art and Culture (SUAC) was recently established with this goal in mind. One of the Center's missions is to help better prepare students in their future professions as members of a global workforce. The Center will serve both as a support facility for the development of language proficiency and a hub for international exchange both with people in the community and also from around the world. What follows is a report on the steps taken to establish the

Center and an examination of its goals and future plans.

2.0 Establishing a Language Education Center at SUAC

The founding of a university language education center requires an institution to make a significant investment while also initiating a number of changes and making various sacrifices. A successful language education center requires adequate funding to hire staff and to provide students with learning resources. In addition to budgetary issues, sufficient space on campus must be set aside for center operations. It is necessary to find a way for existing faculty members who teach core language courses to participate in and support center operations. Integrating the language education center into a university's language curriculum is imperative to prevent the center from becoming either redundant or marginalized. Furthermore, to ensure that students can see some benefits from using such a resource, both academically and personally, care must be taken in

how a language education center defines and promotes itself.

To be successful, a language education center should draw on the experience of other universities while also customizing itself to suit the needs of its students, teachers, staff, and also the budgetary constraints of the host university. To do this, careful planning must take place before opening the Center. Furthermore, members of the university administration and faculty need to provide input from their areas of expertise. To ensure favorable results, people who may have different viewpoints and agendas must establish a good working relationship that values compromise, respect and open-mindedness. Before discussing various educational aspects of the Center at SUAC, some of the preparatory considerations taken to make the Center operational will be outlined below.

2.1 Center integration into SUAC's curriculum

Since each university has its own unique administrative culture and bureaucracy that generally cannot be changed by educators, a discussion of these issues will be omitted in favor of addressing the educational aspects involved in founding the Center. First and foremost, using the Center as a focal point for plans to streamline the new curriculum in 2015 was a primary consideration. Since Center-based teachers teach anywhere between 18 and 20 classes in the core curriculum, their input on teaching materials and course planning is essential. Therefore, a special research project involving some English teachers in the creation of course "Can-do" lists tied to CEFR levels (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) began in February 2013. The Center will also be used as a base to conduct course streaming placement tests like the TOEIC Bridge, and also yearly assessment tests such as the TOEIC IP, which will be given at the end of the academic year to all students enrolled in freshmen and sophomore English courses. These areas of language learning support are important aspects of the Center's long-term mission. Daily operations at the Center are of equal value and is discussed in the following section.

3.0 Center Operations and Obstacles

A great deal has been accomplished in the first three months since the English and Chinese Language Education Center opened in April 2013. In January 2013, a yearly plan of operations, and an operating budget were drafted and then finalized in late March and early April; this plan outlined special projects as well as weekly events that students could participate in to improve their English skills. One challenge that

presented itself at the outset was getting students to come to the Center regularly considering the Center's less than ideal location on campus. Also, much of the work to found the Center was done behind the scenes in early 2013, so many people in the SUAC community were not aware that it had opened. Information about the Center was distributed to freshmen in all departments (about 350 students) during April guidance. Upperclassmen were given announcements about the opening of the Center in their guidance sessions as well.

Word-of-mouth promotion of the Center, as well as announcements made to the English Speaking Society members and English Diploma Course students, ensured that a wide range of students regularly connected to English on campus knew about the Center. **Tables 1** and **2** in the appendix below provide data on Center traffic from April to July. While the large number of visitors is encouraging, clearly more can be done to improve the diversity of Center guests.

To address the above-mentioned concerns, English teachers were asked to promote the Center in their classes. Furthermore, a Center Facebook page was created to make students aware of upcoming events and to get real-time updates on Center news (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/SUAC-Language-Education-Center>). To complement this information, monthly event calendars were created that listed events and times. These calendars were printed and distributed on campus and also made available at the Center. A PDF of the Calendar was also uploaded to the SUAC official Center homepage and made available for download (<http://www.suac.ac.jp/education/educationalcenter>). One other method for promoting center activities was the creation of a Center Newsletter, which highlights upcoming events, as well as offers tips and advice to students. Hard copies were placed around the university and anecdotal feedback from the students indicated that they enjoyed reading it. In order to collect data on how and by whom the Center was being used, a sign-in sheet was created and all students who use the facility are required to enter their name, major, year of study, and their reason for coming. Data from the sign-in sheets is provided in the index below.

3.1 Center Impact

Providing a space on campus where interested students can use English anytime and on any day of the week is thought to have exerted a positive impact on English education at SUAC. One unintended benefit of the establishment of the Center is that upperclassmen have been using it to maintain their level of English fluency. This is an important service for students who have already taken all the English courses available to

them at SUAC and is particularly relevant for students who are job hunting. In particular, many students worked extremely hard over the years to raise their level of English by taking many courses. To suddenly have no more formal English study as juniors or seniors puts students at risk of having their English level drop. Having this happen would be inconsistent with the conduct of an educational institution that promotes itself as fostering students with high-level English skills. These students are also a valuable resource for the Center, as they can be utilized as mentors for younger students.

One other positive effect that the Center has had is that students who visit regularly have shown significant signs of improvement. One student in particular recorded a 150-point increase in his TOEIC score over the first three months of his sophomore year. The same student has also demonstrated a marked improvement in his speaking ability, and by the end of July 2013, had the confidence to lead groups and give presentations completely in English with relative ease. Needless to say, the Center teachers are encouraged by the interest students have shown in using the Center to improve their English skills in a variety of ways. **Table 3** in the appendix below reports on student reasons for visiting the Center. What follows is a more detailed explanation of Center activities.

4.0 A summary of Center events and activities

Despite the enormous amount of time and energy required to establish the Center at SUAC, and also the administrative and logistical obstacles that had to be overcome in the first few months of Center operations, a number of successful activities and events were conducted either at the Center on campus, or held under the auspices of the Center off campus. As far as specific events are concerned, the twice-weekly English Speaking Society meetings, on Mondays and Wednesdays at lunch, have proven the most popular event. There is always at least one teacher present, usually more than one, and the atmosphere is casual and the conversation topics are free-flowing and organic.

Other successful events include the Center sponsored International Community Forum. The forum is a monthly event held on Tuesday's at lunchtime in which a foreign resident of Hamamatsu is invited to make a short presentation about his or her country in English followed by a question and answer session with audience members. Music nights, in which students suggest songs to listen to and discuss, have also proven quite popular as has a support session for students to get help with presentation practice or special projects. It has become apparent that students seem most

interested in fun and stimulating activities that they find relevant to their academic studies or private interests. Consistent teacher participation has also been found to be important in maintaining student attendance.

Another major event sponsored by the Center was SUAC's participation in the Japanese University English Model United Nations (JUEMUN) held in Kyoto in July 2013. Sixteen students, accompanied by three SUAC teachers, took part in the event. Although it was a long and exhausting three days, the event proved life-changing for many of the students who participated in it.

As with any evolving program, the types of events and plans will continue to be modified and improved in the early years of the Center operations. Input from administrative staff, students, and faculty from all of SUAC's departments will shape the way the learning community is served. To gain a sense of student needs, a survey was conducted at the start of the 2013 academic year. Results are provided in **Tables 4** and **5** in the appendix. A detailed list of Center activities is also provided below.

Table 4 in the appendix below shows that a large number of students are available for lunchtime activities, or are not sure when they can attend. **Table 5** indicates that students are less inclined to focus on academic achievement and seem to prefer a balance between TOEIC score improvement and communication activities.

Figure 1 shows the SUAC Japanese University English Model United Nations team. Students used the Center as a place to prepare and practice for this event that took place over three days at Kyoto University of Foreign Students in July 2013. A more detailed description of this event is given in a separate report in this publication. **Figure 2** shows the members of the team of volunteers who teach English lessons to elementary school students at Yokoyama Elementary School in Hamamatsu. This event takes place three times a year and students use the Center to meet, make plans, and create learning materials. **Figure 3** shows a typical Wednesday afternoon at the Center. As mentioned above, the English Speaking Society holds meetings at the Center on Mondays and Wednesdays during lunchtime. These events are open to the entire university community and the public; attendees have included SUAC students, faculty members, staff, course auditors, special guests and SUAC alumni.

Looking back over the first semester, it is fair to say that the SUAC community was given a variety of opportunities to engage in both formal and informal English learning through Center events and activities. Nonetheless, more can be done to serve a segment of the community and student body that may need English remediation or lack motivation. Those plans will be

proposed in the final section of this report.



Figure 1: The English Model United Nations Team at Kyoto University of Foreign Studies



Figure 2: Supporting the community by providing volunteer English lessons to children



Figure 3: ESS lunchtime meetings provide a relaxed and fun way to communicate and build confidence by using English naturally

5.0 Center Plans and Prospects

A number of lessons have been learned by the Center teachers in the first few months of operations that can be used to inform future plans and practices; this information will help teachers to explore new ways to support language learning and encourage students to use the Center resources. One way to do this is to serve more actively as an educational hub and Center

for international communication for the local community. This role dovetails nicely with activities endorsed by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) to provide learning opportunities to local residents. While much attention has been given to developing global communication skills, the Center has an aim to develop glocally as well. Establishing a global and glocal hub will be beneficial for both the Center and SUAC for various reasons. By working closely with the community, the Center will gain a deeper understanding of how to define itself as a place for educational support and lifelong learning; furthermore, local residents (both children and adults) will benefit from exposure to the multifaceted language learning opportunities offered by the Center.

Another role that will become more significant for the Center includes greater coordination of SUAC core English courses with Center activities to support students from various departments, levels and interests. Table 2 in the appendix shows Center traffic has in great part consisted of students in the Department of International Culture. Teachers are working to broaden the Center appeal, providing a space where motivated students can polish their skills, while at the same time engaging students who might be less motivated or who need extra support to achieve success in their English courses. To conclude this preliminary report on the founding of the Center, some details will be provided on specific plans to support learning both within SUAC's English curriculum and around the SUAC community.

5.1 Remedial support

One way to attract underserved students is to encourage those who are struggling with their coursework to participate in directed supplemental online activities, or in events targeted at developing their basic skills. Another measure currently under development is the creation of a peer counseling network, where experienced students act as tutors to classmates who are in need of support. While attracting less motivated students might be one of the greatest challenges that the Center is currently facing, these are often the students who stand the most to gain from their involvement in Center activities.

5.2 Course linking

It is hoped that the Center will provide a central location to provide English content for students that is relevant to not only their studies, but also for their careers and outside interests. Specifically, this could mean assisting in helping design course materials in English for specific purposes as well as support for English presentations that students might be giving

on their course-specific content. All of these activities will be undertaken with the hope of increasing student motivation to study English by providing them with skills that will help increase their chances of success after they graduate.

5.3 Serving the community

The timing is ideal for the Center to get involved in English lessons to support local elementary schools because the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has recently begun to require fifth and sixth grade elementary school students in Japan to have some type of communicative English lessons as part of the school curriculum. Students and Center teachers can share their language-learning insights and resources with oftentimes insufficiently trained and overworked elementary school teachers tasked with English instruction. Planning English activities and lessons for children, with the support and guidance of Center teachers, can help SUAC students develop practical teaching skills while also learning organizational and time management skills. Students interested in teaching after graduation will gain valuable skills that will help them in their future careers.

One project that the Center is currently working on is having SUAC students prepare an English storybook presentation that will be performed for a local elementary school. Another project in development is an English Olympics, where SUAC students will prepare a number of English mini-events and junior high schools students in the community will be invited to test their ability. It is hoped that these events will expose elementary and junior high school students to language activities in a fun and interactive way that they will likely not have experienced before. Having SUAC students prepare and undertake English activities in the community will both help develop their productive language skills and strengthen community ties.

Conclusion

As this paper has demonstrated, developing a language education center that satisfies the requirements of everyone involved is a complicated process that requires a great deal of work and expertise in many areas. The various parties that contribute to its operation are often motivated by different interests. School administrators, for example, may introduce financial as well as practical concerns that can temper the lofty ambitions of teachers who often have different visions about how student needs might best be served. However, the experiences of the authors of this report thus far have been that strong leadership, clear goals,

open-minded discussion and a great deal of patience can do much to mitigate any issues that arise. It is hoped that this review of the actions undertaken to establish and maintain the English and Chinese Language Education Center will inform members of the SUAC community about the progress made during the first semester of Center operations. Furthermore, we also hope that the tone of this report sufficiently characterizes the level of commitment, openness and collaboration that is necessary for the Center to meet the needs of SUAC students, staff and administrators, as well as the greater educational community.

Appendix: Center Attendance and Survey Data

Table 1: Center traffic from May to July 2013 sorted by grade, N=664

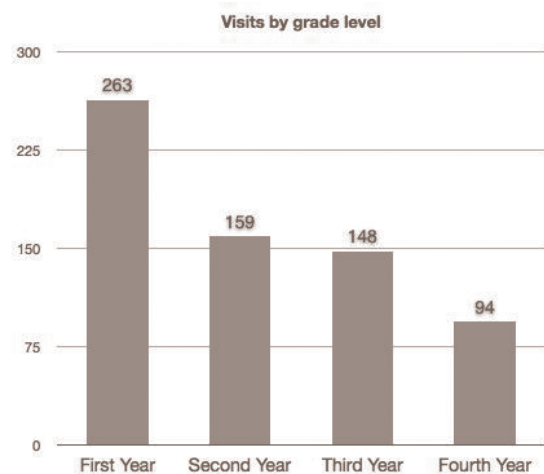


Table 2: Center traffic from May to July 2013 sorted by department, N=664

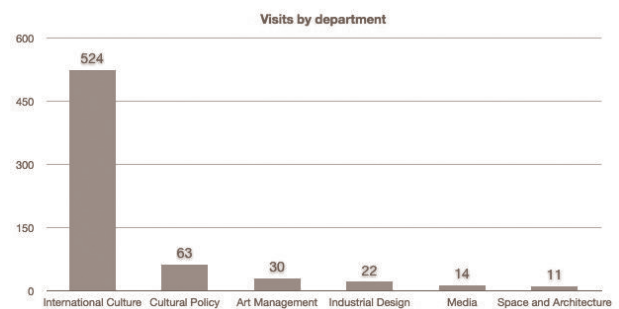


Table 3: Reasons given by students for visiting the Center from May to July 2013, N=617

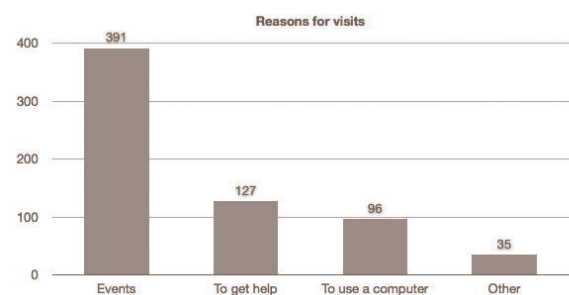


Table 4: Feedback given by first-year students on Center visit preferences, n=202

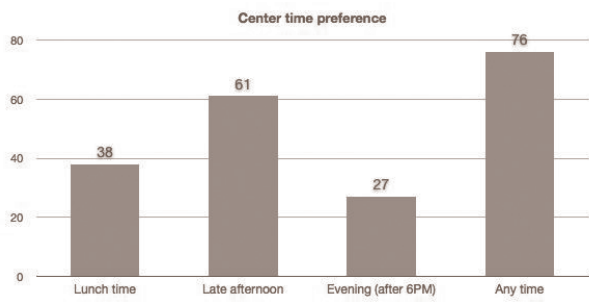


Table 5: Feedback given by first-year students on English needs and views, n=202

