

## **Andragogy in English as a Foreign Language Classes at Prefectural University of Kumamoto**

by Daniel T. Kirk

The demographics of an EFL classroom at Prefectural University of Kumamoto (PUK) is quite diverse. There are men and women from all parts of Japan, and from other countries. Religion, economic class, political persuasion, even primary languages are quite different. Differences in language skills and attitudes toward language learning also vary, and there seem to be two major reasons for this. First is experience abroad. The second major reason is age. With few exceptions, older students, whom I will refer to as “non-traditional” students, as a group have fewer absences, and express themselves more often and with greater facility than their younger counterparts. Their ability and willingness to express themselves in the classroom is a great benefit to everyone involved in the class, both students and the teacher. Their participation and growth are benefits to the university and the community.

Non-traditional students differ from their “traditional” counterparts in several ways. First they have not followed the most common route of entrance into the university. Traditional students begin the testing process for entrance into a university in their final year of high school. This process is completed when they have chosen to accept admission

to one institution or another, have failed all attempts to enter a school, or choose to spend more time preparing to make better marks in the entrance exam process. Non-traditional students enter PUK as students in a number of ways. They can enter as degree-seeking students of one faculty or another by taking special entrance exams. These are offered at a different time than ordinary exams, and their content is also different. Upon successful completion of the admission process, non-traditional students are subject to the same rules and regulations as all other students at the institution. Another method for being enrolled in university classes is to audit a class. The auditors receive audit credit for successful completion of the class, but it will not count toward a degree. The third method for non-traditional students to enroll in university classes is to take part in the "Open University Program." PUK has, for several years, opened classes to the public based on the teacher's willingness to participate in the program. Teachers determine which classes will be opened to the public, the number of students and screening criteria for determining which students will be admitted into their classes. Open classes are advertised to the public, and students attend the class from the first day. These students receive no formal credit for successful completion of the classes, but have some of the privileges of regular students, including use of the library, and tape library in the Foreign Language Education Center. Another method of admission was revived this academic year after the settlement of a labor dispute between non-Japanese teachers of EFL and the university. Since two teachers retained their positions after all of their classes were filled with adjunct teachers, the university opened fourteen classes to the community. Non-traditional students who participate in the classes will receive no credit for them. One final method for non-traditional admission to a

university program is the PUK Recurrent Seminar. Junior and senior high school English teachers have been invited to the university to participate in a teacher development program. (See Beaufait 1995, 1997)

Thus, with EFL courses offered at PUK for non-traditional students, there is a need to understand the dynamics of adult education, what is currently being called *androgogy*. There is also a need to examine the benefits and conflicts in classes with mixed populations. It is also important to consider how implementing androgical teaching methods can improve learning for adults and pre-adult students in mixed classes and adults in the university's teacher development program.

### Who are "Adults"?

When considering "adult education," it is important to define the term "adult." Since there are many definitions, social, biological, and behavioral, it is important to create a definition that can be used for educational purposes. Malcolm S. Knowles (Knowles, 1980) says that an adult is a person who behaves like an adult, and also someone whose self image is that of an adult. Knowles says that adult behavior is that which the culture regards as being assigned to adults. Their roles may include parent, wage earner, responsible citizen, spouse. The second criterion that Knowles uses is whether the individual sees him or herself as an adult according to the existing definitions.

Are students at Prefectural University of Kumamoto adults? The answer to that question is that some are and some are not. By Japanese cultural and legal standards people become adults at the age of 20. The reality is that full-time students in higher education are in something

of a limbo. They may in fact be adults according to the legal statutes and cultural induction ceremonies (*Seijin no Hi* or Coming-of-Age Day), but depend on their parents or social institutions to supply the basic requirements for life; shelter, food, clothing, transportation. They legally become adults at the age of 20, but as students they fulfill few if any adult roles, and do not think of themselves adults. It is probably best to look at traditionally matriculated students on a continuum rather than on a hard scale. Individually they exhibit adult behaviors to varying degrees. Some students live alone and must complete the daily chores that are required for good health and hygiene and a successful academic career. Others live at their parents' home in much the same fashion that they did in elementary school, with little need to concern themselves with their own health and hygiene requirements. Some students earn wages, and though it may not be sufficient to cover the expenses of everyday life, it would be enough to fund their entertainment needs. Some students spend extended periods of time studying in foreign countries, requiring them to function in other languages to fulfill all of their learning and living requirements. Finally there are also students who support themselves entirely, struggling with part-time jobs and student loans.

There is another portion of the regularly matriculated students at PUK who are adults both in their behavior and fulfillment of roles and in their self-perception as adults. These students have enrolled in the university for various reasons and at the same time continue to fill their adult roles. Their motivations for returning to school also vary according to the individual. A large majority of these students are women, and in interviews, most of these students state their reasons for enrolling in an undergraduate or graduate program are that they want

to study. Several of the interviewees are professionals who have taken time off from their work or who are still working and who have come to study. These students stated that they did not expect the degrees that they were working toward to have any direct relationship to promotion in their professions. They are not expecting salary increases, nor are they thinking about changing their professions.

A second group of adults attending EFL classes at PUK are students enrolled in the Open University Program. This program has, until this academic year, made it possible for some adults to attend EFL classes on an audit basis for minimal fees. (No EFL courses were offered in the first semester of the 1999 - 2000 school year because late curriculum changes and personnel decisions made it impossible for teachers to open their classes or accept applications to them.) Course offerings were advertised, applications were solicited, and individual teachers were asked to determine which of the applicants could attend. These students attend classes, and while they receive no formal credit for successful completion of the course, they are, for the most part, successful in completing the class requirements. Most of the students who have attended EFL classes have been homemakers, often self-employed with work outside the home, and retired people, many of whom also participate in numerous volunteer organizations. This group is highly motivated, and attend because they are interested in self-improvement.

Yet a third group of adult learners attending classes at PUK include the teachers attending, what has until this year been called, the English Teachers' Recurrent Seminar. The seminar's objectives have been to help teachers develop their ability to reflect on and improve their teaching and to help them improve their language ability in a cooperative

atmosphere so that they could return to their schools and help their students and colleagues meet challenges that they faced. Over the eight years that the seminar has been conducted, there have been a few teachers in training who have attended, but the large majority of participants have been junior and senior high school English teachers, and most of them have been from the public school system. The groups have been mixed with fairly equal numbers of men and women attending. The teachers who attend take their own personal leave from work. They often come long distances from around the prefecture and must provide their own transportation, and room and board. There are no formal rewards or regulations in place to encourage or force teachers to attend. They attend because they feel a need to improve themselves

### What is “Andragogy”

*Andragogy* is adult education.(Knowles, 1980) It can be contrasted most easily with pedagogy, which is child education. Both words come from Greek; *agogos*, which means to lead or to teach. The *peda* of pedagogy comes from *paid*, which is child, and *andra* is adult. Malcolm S. Knowles has written and edited several books on the topic of andragogy, and he shows that androgogy and pedagogy are quite different.

Table 1: Comparison of Andragogical and Pedagogical Concepts

	Pedagogy	Andragogy
The concept of the learner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dependent personality</li> <li>• teacher has full responsibility for decision making about what, how, and how well learning is to happen</li> <li>• student carries out teacher's directions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independent personality</li> <li>• teacher responsible for helping students become self-directed learners</li> <li>• students and teachers cooperate to direct learning</li> </ul>
Role of the learner's experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• little experience in formal education</li> <li>• teacher possesses experience along with materials developers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Much experience in formal and informal education</li> <li>• learners and experiences become sources of materials</li> </ul>
Readiness to learn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• students ready to learn when they are told they are</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ready to learn when they have a need to</li> </ul>
Orientation to learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• subject centered learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• life-centered, task-centered, or problem-centered learning</li> </ul>
Motivation to learn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• extrinsic or external motivations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intrinsic or internal motivations</li> </ul>

The model above is simplified in a number of ways. As for the concept of the learners engaged in pedagogy, they are not entirely dependent, and often make choices on their own. On the other hand, adults are not always independent, especially when approaching a new skill or discipline. They may depend entirely on the teacher for direction. The

role of experience can be a double-edged sword. Adults have long years of classroom experience and the rules that govern them, so that when they come to class and sit in a desk, they once again begin to rely on the set of learned behaviors from their previous school life. Again the distinction between adult and pre-adult learners is often indistinct and sometimes completely untrue. For example, children are equally well motivated by intrinsic motivations, but formal schooling has allowed them to rely on the teacher and external inducements to direct their learning. Knowles and others have provided another set of standards for education, which allow students and teachers to reevaluate the paradigms that they have used to view teaching and learning.

### **Implications for EFL at PUK**

For mixed classes of adult and pre-adult students, andragogy is important for encouraging the latter to become independent, self-directed learners of English. The foreign language program at the university provides nowhere near the amount of time necessary to be competent communicators of English. If students find the need for higher levels of competence, they will be best served with the knowledge of how to improve themselves. Even in the world of non-governmental organizations, volunteers have found that it is more effective to teach a group of people to feed themselves than to become dependent on supplies from the outside. To the extent that non-traditional students are not accustomed to taking control of their learning, the teacher must also present the andragogical paradigm of learning and encourage them to take advantage of the system that works best for them. However, the non-traditional students at PUK have all chosen to attend



EFL classes with a greater degree of intrinsic motivation than most of their traditional counterparts. Even adult students matriculated into various degree programs have been away from formal education and have decided to return for the purposes of their own self improvement or for career advancement or change.

There are several advantages to mixed classes of adults and pre-adults. With adults in the classroom, pre-adults are exposed to new modes of discourse and interaction. Most traditional students are content to sit quietly in their seats and be as inconspicuous as possible. In interviews with traditional students, those who are willing to engage say they find themselves in a conflict between the urge to contribute, and the knowledge that they must give others opportunities, even if they are unwilling to respond. In questionnaires and interviews of adult students, they have made similar responses. They seem to be disappointed by the low levels of student involvement, and restrain themselves from completely coopting the class. On some occasions, classes have become conversations between the teacher and a non-traditional student. On further investigation the student was attempting to bait others into participating, a clever but so far unsuccessful strategy. In questionnaires concerning the inclusion of adults in the Open University Program, a few students have expressed their displeasure with adult students controlling as much class time as they do. They feel that their language skills are not sufficient to compete for equal time with adult students. While this may be a valid complaint, they have never, to my knowledge, sought out strategies to help them cope with this problem, and this comment has been made by very few students.

Another advantage to having non-traditional students in the EFL

classroom is that all of the students can begin to look to each other for support. With few exceptions, non-traditional students come to the class with higher levels of English proficiency, more life experience, and greater motivation than traditional students. The adults become role models for the pre-adults. Instead of relying on just one teacher for a model of behavior, there are as many models as there are non-traditional students. Most traditional students learn quickly to take advantage of their adult colleagues' knowledge and understanding.

One final advantage to opening university EFL classes to non-traditional students is that they build networks in classrooms that last and develop following completion of the classes. This kind of networking is an advantage for the students, the university, and community. In the graphic representation of student interaction, you will see in Table 2 that non-traditional students in the Open University Program develop networks among themselves. Many of these relationships have lasted for more than eight years. Many of the participants in the program return to the university to continue taking classes, often in other disciplines. Several participants have gone on to enter graduate degree programs at other universities, while others have gone on to start careers as English teachers. Several of these teachers are active in local associations for foreign language teachers, thereby continuing their association with PUK teachers as well as expanding their influence in the teaching and learning community. Teachers who participate in the Recurrent Seminar also develop their own networks of teachers with similar interests.

Table 2: Student Interaction

	Open U Participants	Non - traditional Enrolled	Recurrent Seminar
Interaction with traditional students	Interaction with traditional students in limited number of regular university courses. Non - traditional students acting as role models	Interaction with traditional students on collegial basis	Interaction with teacher - trainees who are looking forward to working with participants as colleagues
Interaction with other Adult Students	Have developed networks and have continued their associations for a number of years following completion of classes	Limited to exchanges that occur in the classroom	Participants in the seminar have organized their own study groups following completion of seminar
Interaction with Teachers	Since several of the participants were originally or have become EFL teachers, they participate with teachers in professional organizations	Very few of these students become EFL teachers, so there is limited contact after they graduate	Coordinators (teachers) and seminar participants share a similar profession, so there is some interaction after the seminar

## Conclusion

Both the inclusion of non-traditional students and andragogical teaching methods in EFL classes at Prefectural University of Kumamoto have benefitted participating students, teachers and the community as a whole. Traditional students benefit from non-traditional students as models of good language learners and adult behavior. Teachers benefit from the inclusion of non-traditional students in the classroom as they provide support for traditional students. They also become valuable assets to the profession of language teaching and to the community in general through volunteer activities or professions in which they become involved. The employment of andragogical teaching methods in EFL classes at PUK provides students with an additional paradigm for defining their roles as students and language learners. It will also help students learn to provide learning opportunities for themselves rather than depend on external factors to direct their learning.

## References

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