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The Evolution of the English Language Institute: Curriculum and Structural Reform

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Abstract

Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS), founded in 1987, is a private university dedicated to the pursuit of excellence in international studies. Faculty initially comprised an English language department with pedagogy focusing predominantly upon grammar translation. However, in order to also promote a communicative approach to English-language education, the university created the English Language Institute (ELI) external to the faculty in 1989. Since its inception, and to cater for the ongoing expansion of the university, the ELI's teaching body has grown to its current complement of 60 full-time lecturers from a number of countries around the world. In order to coordinate such a large group of teachers at a time of multi-layered university changes, comprising, among others, both structural and curriculum reform (Kennedy, 1988; Waters, 2009), the ELI has received support from the university to create a new management team comprising the director plus six Principal Lecturers which started on April 1st, 2017. Accordingly, this paper comprises a description of the new management structure.

Introduction

Kanda University of International Studies (KUIS), founded in 1987, is a private university dedicated to the pursuit of excellence in international studies. Faculty initially comprised an English language department with pedagogy focusing predominantly upon grammar translation. However, in order to also promote a more communicative approach to English language education, the university created the English Language Institute (ELI) external to the faculty in 1989. Initially staffed with only four full-time overseas instructors, the ELI has continually expanded to meet the increasing needs of the ever-growing and developing university. Accordingly, the ELI lecturers now teach in all four of the university's departments including: the Department of English, the Department of Asian Languages (Chinese, Korean, Indonesian, Vietnamese, and Thai), the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, and the Department of International Communication. In short, the ELI predominantly teach Freshman and Sophomore students in all departments.

To cater for the expansion of the university, the ELI's teaching body currently stands at 60 full-time lecturers. In order to coordinate such a large group of teachers from multiple countries, and from what often proves to be quite diverse educational backgrounds, traditions and cultures, various management initiatives have been implemented over the years with varying degrees of success. However, with the constant turnover of ELI members, challenges facing the ELI have been (a) replacing managers, (b) ensuring course consistency both within and across the four departments and (c) promoting equality in both teaching assignments and workloads. Accordingly, at a time of multi-layered university changes comprising, among others, both structural and curriculum reform (Kennedy, 1988; Waters, 2009), and given the differing and changing needs of the four departments within which ELI instructors teach, the ELI has received support from the university to create a new management team comprising the

director and six Principal Lecturers (PLs) which started on April 1st, 2017. Before taking a look at these positions in more detail, a succinct description of the need for management in these areas follows below.

Background

To support the ELI's appointed director, different formations of management teams have been introduced and tried over the years. For example, until the 2017-2018 academic year, the management team predominantly comprised a varying number of doctoral-level assistant directors in charge of their own individual specialist areas. However, a constant challenge for the management team was whether duties could be covered when a manager decided to leave. Furthermore, due to the need to recreate and tweak positions to make them suitable for replacement hires, roles tended not to be clearly defined. For this reason, 2017 saw the introduction of a new management system with the overall goals being to promote more stability in the management team, and to better coordinate the department.

With the ELI endeavouring to create custom-made materials for courses instead of using commercially available textbooks, curriculum and materials development remain key parts of the foundations of the department. Upon these foundations, research has not only helped to inform developments, but it has also thrived through ELI lecturers' work and professional interests. As ELI lecturers are hired to join the department at varying stages in their careers, though, particularly in terms of teaching and research experience, providing opportunities for professional development (PD) has received an increasing amount of interest within the department. Therefore, whether lecturers have a research-based and/or a coursework-based educational background, and whatever the extent of their teaching experiences, providing opportunities for PD has entailed catering for a range of professional needs and interests. For these reasons, better

support and coordination of both PD and research has become increasingly important.

In contrast to ELI members' offices being located in different buildings and on different floors, the completion of the new "KUIS 8" building has enabled all ELI lecturers' offices to be housed in the same area; previous issues related to a fragmented department in terms of location have now been solved, therefore. However, with the new building housing (a) the ELI, (b) 16 state-of-the-art classrooms, and (c) the Self Access Learning Center, a strong focus remains on the university's adoption of educational technology. Given that the new building comprises a plethora of cutting-edge equipment, and given that all students and teachers use iPads, proving adequate training and support with the use of educational technology is crucial.

Resulting from the aforementioned expansion of the ELI, there was a clear need for better administrative support for the academic work and initiatives undertaken within the department. Therefore, in addition to the need for support in areas including curriculum, assessment, research, and PD, the proposal for a new management team also included a position for academic administration. Furthermore, to promote teamwork and to enable the PL team to cover in the event one left the university, the proposal comprised two sets of roles and responsibilities for each position as detailed below:

- Set 1: Roles and responsibilities related to core procedures crucial to the daily running of the department, such as the administration of the twice-yearly KAP (Kanda Assessment Project) speaking test, were defined for completion as a team. Not only was the aim to promote collaboration among the PLs, but it was also to ensure common knowledge of procedures so that continuity was maintained.

- Set 2: Roles and responsibilities specific to the individual specialist PL position were defined.

Therefore, in order to cater for the departmental needs described above, and to also cater for structural and curriculum renewal initiatives across all departments, the university approved the appointment of six experienced members of the ELI to the new management team.

As can be seen from Diagram 1 below, the PL team are collectively responsible for the management of six project coordinators, who, in turn, are responsible for the running of courses taught by the ELI. It is the management and development of these courses that necessitates the PL team: courses and student performance are related to curriculum and assessment; the appropriate use of technology and improving as a professional are related to PD; conference presentations, journal publications and projects are related to research; and the administrative requirements associated with running of the ELI, for example, budgeting and scheduling, are related to the PL position for academic administration. Therefore, following the structural diagram of the ELI below, the PL positions are described in more detail.

The Structure of the ELI

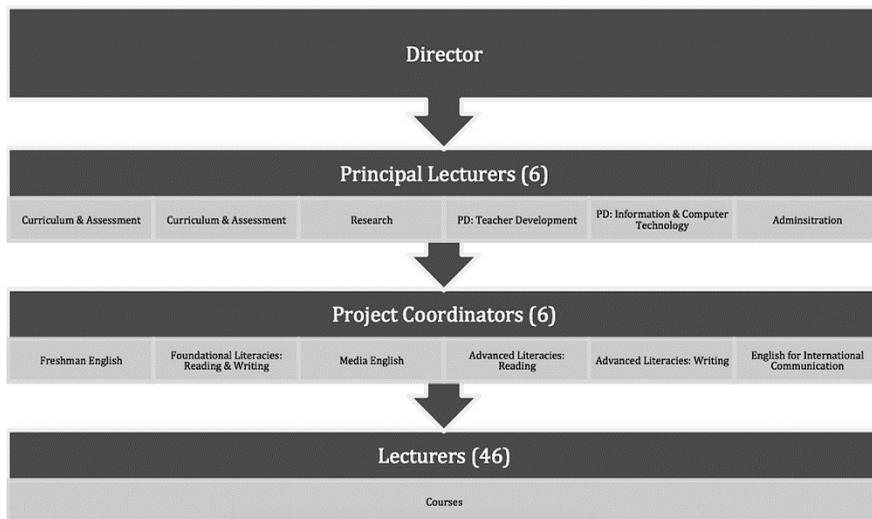


Diagram 1: The Structure of the ELI (note: The number of lecturers are written in brackets).

The recruiting process comprised a comprehensive application procedure which lead to a presentation and interview. Hired at the Masters level with the title Principal Lecturer (PL), two members of the six successful members selected were appointed curriculum and assessment duties, two were appointed to PD duties (one to teacher development and one to technology), one was appointed to duties related to coordinating research and one to academic-administration duties.

Curriculum

As the ELI expanded so did the number of teachers, courses taught and relevant coordinators within the four departments. As time progressed, this led to differences in

ideas about the best methodology to be used and what kind of materials should be included, resulting in a confusing variety of approaches and types of materials being used both across and within courses. At the same time, it was felt that changes in the global view of English necessitated a move away from a CLT (communicative language teaching) approach (Johnson, Lyddon, Nelson, Selman, & Worth, 2015). Consequently, a new approach, which is derived from sociocultural theory, social semiotics and multiliteracies, was implemented across all courses.

The Freshman English (FE) curriculum has been undergoing development since 2011, and the result has been the implementation of a process-oriented syllabus. In effect, to provide learners with a broad range of learning experiences the following six processes were decided upon: self-analysis, audio/visual analysis, data analysis, extended interaction, communication strategies and problem solving. In the Foundational Literacies (FL) course, a genre-based approach founded on the narrative, recount, procedural, informational, and argumentative genres, has been implemented. Both the FE and FL courses support the multiliteracies approach and take into consideration “the increasingly global and digitized contexts of Japanese higher education” (Johnson et. al, 2015, p. 103).

A primary goal in the ELI, with respect to curriculum, is to execute changes that have been in the design process for several years. One of these is to reduce the number of core courses to six in order to a) make overseeing these courses more straightforward; and b) allow for more uniform learning experiences among all learners. The core courses will now be Freshman English, Foundational Literacies, Sophomore English, Media English, Academic Literacies: Reading, Academic Literacies: Writing and English for International Communication, sophomore year (EIC2).

Another objective has been to give the ELI instructors a voice in the changes that are being implemented. Primarily, we want to utilise the wealth of experience we have

in the ELI, from both seasoned instructors who know the system and also from newer recruits who are coming to us with a fresh perspective. This endeavour will result in stronger buy-in from the ELI lecturers if everyone is involved. By entrusting teachers with responsibilities and showing them that they are trusted, the likelihood of them developing a sense of teamwork will increase (Starratt, 2003). As such, we have been in communication with various department heads and ELI project group coordinators, who have in turn communicated with their group members, to ask for feedback and suggestions. In addition, early in the first semester, a survey was sent out to all coordinators and instructors asking them for their ideas. The results helped inform many of the changes that are now being applied.

A further part of the ongoing collaboration with instructors has also involved producing clear outcomes for each of the above mentioned courses. Coordinators worked together with their group members to gather ideas and modify suggested course outcomes. Having reviewed their ideas, our goal has been to make the format of each course outcome document and its related content as consistent as possible across courses within each department. Currently, teachers are usually limited to teaching within one department or major. This new model will produce a more uniform teaching and learning experience, potentially allowing ELI teachers to teach the same course across different departments. An ongoing challenge with this will be to satisfy differing departmental needs, which include slightly differing outcomes and number of classes/koma per week, whilst still negotiating consistency amongst courses.

Furthermore, we are developing protocols to ensure that the learning outcomes are being met across the individual courses. Therefore, questionnaire forms, which are administered to learners at the end of each semester, will provide feedback as to whether their learning experience has matched the stringent learning outcomes that

have been developed. This feedback is vital to not only uphold student satisfaction, but to also ensure that they are fully prepared for all subsequent classes.

Finally, course materials, while often in abundance, were until last year being made available in different ways, either through classroom management tools such as Moodle, or in shared folders available through the school's online server. This variety resulted in instructors, especially newer recruits, not always being able to easily locate materials, which would often lead to confusion and/or frustration. As such, a new system on Google Drive is being implemented and project groups are being asked to assist in selecting materials that will be uploaded.

Assessment

Curriculum and assessment are related, and as such, we are addressing the lack of consistency related to assessment that has evolved due to the aforementioned growth in the ELI. Whereas some teachers have focused more on formative assessment, others have focused more on summative. In addition, teachers have indicated that they have been unsure of which tasks need to be assessed, and if so, how. To rectify this situation, we have decided that a priority for this year is to develop standardized assessments for certain activities, units, and courses.

Furthermore, we will make collaborative decisions about how to weight individual units/assessments within a course fairly and how to present clearly defined guidelines for more subjective assessments. This will lead once again to a standardized system to promote equality between departments, courses, and classes.

Research & Curriculum

Two of the stated objectives for research-related issues within the ELI were to 1) facilitate, support and oversee research projects, and 2) maintain a record of all such

research conducted through the ELI. A system was already in place whereby any teacher wishing to conduct research had to apply using a paper-based form. The amount of paperwork needing completion would depend on the level of funding requested and any ethical considerations (i.e. the involvement of human subjects). Although policies regarding ethics in Japan tend to be less strict than those implemented in the West, this thorough system conformed to international standards.

However, the quantity of paperwork involved may have been discouraging would-be researchers; it also meant that any record-keeping became arduous. Research grants carry institutional obligations that researchers need to fulfill (e.g. publication of results within 2 years); keeping track of the status of research projects proved challenging. This paper-based system and the difficulties in record-keeping also made it difficult to cross-reference teachers' research projects to, for example, applications to present the work at conferences.

A new online system for research applications addressed these concerns. By filling out an application in a digital format, all applications are now automatically entered into a spreadsheet, from which they can be allocated a 'research number' (see below). Additionally, if an applicant decides not to use human subjects or apply for funding, whole sections of the process can now be skipped, thus creating a more efficient, less intimidating application process; this in turn leads to faster responses/feedback from the Director and the PL for Research and Curriculum. These improvements have created an environment that encourages more people to conduct research.

The introduction of a more formulaic number system for listing research projects has also enabled better record-keeping. The system generates a number based on the date of approval, level of funding, involvement of human subjects, and whether or not an applicant intends to present or submit the research in a journal, presentation...etc. Thus, a lecturer hoping to secure university funding to present their work at a

conference, for example, need only provide their research number (assuming their research has been approved) rather than re-explain the content of their project.

The loss of Ph.D.-level research experts that preceded the hiring of PLs meant that teachers have fewer options in terms of who to speak to directly about research. However, in previous years an Academic Advisory Board (AAB) had been formed, comprising six prestigious academics with renowned work in fields (e.g. Multiliteracies) pertinent to work being done at the ELI. Some AAB members have already visited the institution, but teachers perhaps remained unaware of how to, or even that they could, contact the board members directly for advice regarding research. In resolution, a system has been set up on a shared online folder that lists all AAB members' (and other consultants employed by the university) interests, contact details, areas of expertise, scheduled visiting dates, and example articles and papers they have written. ELI lecturers are encouraged to contact all consultants directly for any supplementary assistance they feel they need, thus further contributing to an environment conducive to research.

All consultants were able to list their research interests and experiences by responding to a survey that was also sent out to all teachers within the ELI. The idea behind this was to create 'Research Communities' (RC) that would offer opportunities for collaborative research and/or peer feedback on one another's ideas in an informal setting, as well as give (newer) staff the opportunity to get to know one another, within and across different departments. The recent move to a new building where teachers share certain spaces complemented this process. Research has shown that 'organically' formed, informal 'Communities of Practice' in certain contexts can lead to more effective results than more formalised, 'top-down' organisations (Blankenship & Ruona, 2007). Thus the first stage of forming these RC was to speak informally with all teachers, then identify areas of shared research interest, and list these areas in the form

of a survey that respondents could sign up to. Once these lists were created and shared, ‘Research Communities’ were formed. Mailing lists were created for each community, and then the choice to meet with one another and share ideas was left up to the teachers themselves, with no possibly restrictive, compulsory element forming any counterproductive pressure.

While there are no doubt challenges ahead the above changes provide examples of the great progress that has been made in reaching our twin goals of better record-keeping and the facilitation of research.

Professional Development: Teacher Development

While the ELI has existed since 1989, and some informal PD was occurring, the predecessor of today’s formalized system of ELI PD began in the early 2000s. It coincided with significant changes for the university (expansion of the ELI, an increased number of university departments, and contractual changes) and ELI lecturers identified “a danger that useful teaching techniques and ideas [would] go unshared and unnoticed,” in such times of transition (Peake & Fraser, 2004, p. 179). Little documentation on our PD activities since exists in the ELI (Peake & Fraser, 2004; Fenton-Smith & Stillwell, 2010) so a great deal of institutional memory has been lost. Now, at the close of another such time of change, we have begun working to renew our commitment to PD for the department.

In EFL, like other fields, teaching benefits from continued exposure to PD opportunities. Sadly, many of these attempts fail to address the needs of the teachers or are driven by the goals of the administration rather than realities of the classroom, leaving student needs behind (Diaz-Maggioli, 2004). One way to achieve this is through distributed leadership, when student and institutional needs are one and the same. Such an approach to PD can revolutionize how a school works through

collaboration and increase teacher motivation (Ngambi, 2011; Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2012). Furthermore, continuing professional development (CPD) allows teachers to respond to changes in methodology or paradigm shifts in views on language education. Richards (2001) states that consistent, effective PD is crucial because, “ESL/EFL is a rapidly changing field and teachers need regular opportunities to update their professional knowledge and skills” (p. 206). Drago-Severson (2009) also suggests that pressure on educators is increasing due to the challenges of globalization and the rapid pace of 21st century development and technology. She argues that, “if schools are to adapt to the current conditions, they need to be places where adults as well as children can grow, and we must change the ways in which we work, grow, and learn together” (p. 7). It is with this in mind that we have chosen to move forward with a variety of activities to promote teacher development and rebuild a PD system focused on collaboration, leadership, and sustainability.

In order to determine teacher development needs or goals of the ELI, a needs analysis brainstorming session was held at which lecturers were given a definition of PD and asked to answer the following four questions:

- What types of formal events would you like to see in the ELI?
- What types of informal events would you like to see in the ELI
- What support do you feel you need to be a more effective teacher in your classroom?
- What support do you feel you need to be an active member of the language education professional community (in Japan/in general)?

From the responses, we were able to determine the priority of what kind of support lecturers needed. Results clearly indicated there was interest in internal PD activities

(workshops, guest speakers) as well as external (conference presentations) so this first year with the PL team has included activities addressing both. To respond to the need for classroom practice and research support, two speakers from within the university, Dr. Tim Murphey and Dr. Bill Snyder, were invited to speak on group dynamics and reflective practice for research, respectively. Another event designed to address a need for idea-sharing was that of an internal PD share event, at which all returning ELI lecturers shared a classroom activity or research conducted to encourage collaboration and promote an environment of openness and sharing. Other activities created in response to self-identified need of the lecturers included: promotion of university publications as a place for ELI members to publish their work, workshops or speaker visits geared towards needs mentioned, and feedback among fellow writers (e.g. all those submitting to the same publication like a conference proceedings).

The activities listed above were one-time events; however, this year we have also worked to establish ongoing projects or activities to support CPD. Though such one-time PD events are useful, Boyle, While, and Boyle (2004) found that, when compared them with long-term, sustained PD there was a qualitative difference between the two types; longer-term PD was more likely to result in changes in teaching practices. As such, a number of opportunities for teacher development have been reintroduced or implemented in the ELI that would increase the amount of interaction between teachers and, with time, lead to improved teaching practices. Some examples of this include: coordination of peer writing circles to provide accountability and motivation, providing editing and feedback on lecturers' articles or proposals, compiling and sharing upcoming calls for proposals or publications, being available for individual support through consultations, and encouraging the teacher-led PD Committee to be active. As we go forward, we hope to invite outside speakers and non-ELI faculty to engage in dialogue with our lecturers through workshops or talks, implement reading or practice circles for

those looking to discuss literature, and even share self-assessment tools for teachers to identify areas in which they wish to grow and pursue their own development. Further, we hope the environment will foster informal CPD by and among lecturers through the work of the PD Committee as well as other motivated people. By beginning with student needs, then providing space and support for teachers to grow both inside and out of their classrooms, ELI PD can ensure a solid foundation for all parties to do their best work.

Professional Development: Information & Communications Technology

Information and communications technologies have been described as “the defining transformative innovation for higher education in the 21st century” (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004, p. 95). Many institutions of higher learning have rapidly adopted innovative technologies with varying levels of success. In many cases technologies are adopted only to lie dormant, used by a select cadre of technologically savvy early adopters. Therein lies a central problem with the use of technology in the classroom; it is contingent on the support structure available as a part of teacher development. When implementing technologies into the teaching and learning process it “is critical to ensure that the benefits are fully realized” (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004, p. 104). There are a number of ways to ensure that technologies are employed in accordance with best practice. In the ELI, as part of our PD program, we have put in place many structures, policies, and procedures to better ensure that ICT is used to its potential.

Structural reform with ICT in the ELI is best illustrated by orientations to the recently completed building, KUIS 8. Each classroom has been equipped with many state-of-the-art technologies that provide a wide range of affordances. The classrooms are equipped with a wireless projection system, outputting to three different high resolution short-throw projectors. The system was designed to be used wirelessly with

Apple's iPads over a private network for each classroom. In addition, KUIS 8 contains an experimental classroom, designed to accommodate emerging technologies such as virtual reality and augmented reality. The state-of-the-art systems offer a wealth of possibilities, but as with all novel things, require orientation and support to utilize correctly. In the ELI, support was provided with ICT in a few key ways.

First, orientations to the technology were done in small groups, allowing teachers to personally experiment with the technology. We provided audio-visual guides, as well as text based instructions to support the use of the system. In addition, for the first week of classes we were available to assist teachers in classes. As classes proceeded, it became apparent that more face-to-face instruction was necessary, so two follow-up workshops were organized: The first to review the technology, and the second to gather feedback and generate ideas for using the technology. The second session was particularly helpful as it enabled peer-based teacher development.

However, it is not always possible to meet teachers in person for workshops due to their busy schedules. Asynchronous teacher development provides a solution to this. Asynchronous teacher development is closely tied to the principles of blended learning, which is when “a portion of the traditional face-to-face instruction is replaced by web-based online learning” (“What is Blended Learning?”). At KUIS, we are in the process of setting up a shared Google Drive repository for materials. This drive is maintained by our management team, who have control over content that is added. Some of the content that has been added so far includes scholarly articles from visitors to the university, video recordings of workshops, and technology tutorial videos. The resources enable teachers to pursue their PD in their own time and at their own pace.

A support structure is an important component of ICT integration. Garrison and Kanuka, (2004) comment that “teaching faculty require assistance with course development needs, time management of their learning curve, and technical assistance.”

(p. 103). Thus, we have designed a tech support ticket system to report issues and connect teachers to the best people to solve the problems. Furthermore, we also felt it was important to utilize our wealth of available peer-based knowledge. Through the Computer Committee, a small committee of teachers who support the use of CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) methods, we surveyed teachers about their various competencies with various software and hardware platforms, drafted a list of this information, and made it available to all teachers. With this in place, should teachers have a problem with technology or require assistance, they can easily find someone with relevant knowledge. For instance, if someone has a problem with Excel on their Mac, they can determine who has experience with Macs and can easily find the support they need. Systems such as this strengthen the workplace environment by creating a more organic support structure.

Administration

As the ELI has grown, so has the weight of the administrative tasks that are necessary to keep the department running smoothly. The inclusion of a Principal Lecturer for Administration in the new management structure not only provides support to the Director for dealing with day-to-day and ongoing tasks, such as scheduling, but also allows greater attention to be given to previously underserved areas. Furthermore, as a current lecturer in the ELI, the PL for Administration brings to the role an understanding of the needs of the department and its stakeholders from an academic, rather than purely administrative perspective. As such the PL can advocate for systems and policies that align with and support the academic mission of the ELI. If we are to consider this administrative work as provision of a service, then the consumers of the service, or “customers”, comprise both “external customers” (the students) and “internal customers” such as lecturers in the ELI, faculty members in other departments,

and university administrative staff (White, Hockley, van der Horst Jansen, & Laughner, 2008, pp. 117-118). The approach taken with the provision of service to each of these groups is the same as that outlined above in the other areas of PL Team responsibility. We: a) seek to remove obstacles to productivity and create an environment in which each “customer” is given the support needed to achieve their best; b) aim to build a collaborative community in which each individual’s needs are valued, opinions are listened to, and consensus and ‘buy-in’ are sought; c) work not just to fix problems but to actively seek out possibilities for the future, and wish to inspire the same enthusiasm in others (Buller, 2013). Some of the current areas of focus are highlighted below.

In addition to the classes offered, the ELI also runs an Academic Support Area in which students can receive one-to-one support and advice on how to improve their presentation, writing and conversation skills. The move to a new building at the start of the academic year provided the opportunity for some reorganization of the area, and we are now working on strategies to both promote the services offered and better tailor them to the needs of the students. Close monitoring and analysis of the data generated by the online booking system has provided useful insights into how students are using the area, and feedback from the student survey that was carried out in collaboration with KUIS’ Self-Access Learning Center has revealed further avenues for improvement.

With regards to the lecturers in the ELI, the move to a new building at the beginning of the year provided both challenges and opportunities. Through a process of consultation, which involved an online survey and the meeting of a working-party, new systems have been put in place and new norms have been established to create the most comfortable, effective and productive working environment that the space allows. Clarity and transparency in communication are also a priority, as is ease of access to information. Work is ongoing in updating and refining the department handbook, and all administrative documents are now organized and shared on Google Drive to allow

lecturers to access them at any time and from any location. Furthermore, the procedures for applying for conference funding and requesting reimbursements are being streamlined and moved almost entirely online in order to reduce paper waste, increase the ease of use, and allow easier and more effective sharing, management and storage of information.

Finally, strengthening relationships and increasing communication with university administration staff is also important in order to avoid the “silo-ization” that often occurs between academic and administrative branches of educational organizations (White et al., 2008, p. 28), and to find ways in which we can make changes that are mutually beneficial. Current dialogue includes discussions about how to reorganize the above-mentioned systems for conference funding applications and reimbursement requests in a way that also reduces the burden for the administrative staff who process them.

Conclusion

At a key stage in the evolution of the ELI, this paper comprises a description of the developments currently in progress during a time of curriculum and structural reform. With a newly introduced management team, the director and the PLs have had the opportunity to focus on areas important to the ELI, namely: curriculum, assessment, research, professional development, teacher development, appropriate usage of ICT, and clarity in the rules and regulations associated with the smooth administration of the department. What has transpired so far is that the common roles have necessitated collaboration. Moreover, despite the individuality associated with the PL-specific roles, the collaborative nature of the team provides positive opportunities for constructively critical peer feedback while devising new management systems. Adopting Aristotle’s belief that, “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts” has been beneficial,

therefore. While this first year of implementation necessitates a number of newly created systems and procedures, the fruits of these undertakings and developments will, hopefully, be reaped from here onwards.

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