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### **How the ELI assists GAs in their professional development**

I am very interested in teacher development. In this paper, I will address the following question from the ELI Project Ideas sheet. **In what specific ways, and in what areas, does teaching in the ELI assist GAs' professional development?** I am delighted to have the opportunity to be able to teach in the ELI while pursuing a Master's degree in Second Language Studies. For my MA here, I chose the pedagogical strand as my specialty because I think it is the most practical for getting a job afterwards and I like teaching. It has been said that our department is rather theoretical and research based, so it seems like a perfect combination to be able to teach here at the same time. The training provided by the ELI is fantastic. In this paper I will explain why.

### **Learning the Ropes**

I will briefly go through some of the duties of being a GA in the ELI chronologically starting with the beginning of the school year. Before the school starts in the fall and the spring semester, there are required to do ELI testing duties. The director of the ELI, Mr. Kenton Harsch, who everybody calls Kenny, usually explains the basics and there are other ELI GAs who have been through the process before present, so they can help explain if necessary. As a teacher and possible future program administrator, it is interesting to see the behind the scenes work that goes on to place students. It is a lot of work in a short amount of time for the Director of the ELI, Kenny, but there is a very well organized system that runs smoothly.

At the beginning of the semester, there is the meeting for all ELI GAs to meet each other, have some general announcements, and then we separate into groups according to our curriculum areas. I find the whole atmosphere and all of the people in the ELI to be very supportive of each other. There is a very collaborative atmosphere. I recall in the beginning I asked other ELI teachers lots of questions. Everybody was helpful and provided helpful answers to my answers when I asked in person as well as by email. Sometimes I asked the same question to different people because it can be useful to have different opinions and then decide for myself what to do. I remember emailing Jee Hyun, the lead teacher for reading, several times at the beginning of the semester with questions. I also wanted to get her approval on some forms before I decided to use them in class. She provided helpful feedback, but she was also very supportive, adding comments to the likes of, here are some suggestions, but in the end, it is your choice what to do in your classroom; You're a great teacher and I'm sure it will be fine. Such positive feedback empowered me to have confidence in myself and to make my own informed decisions. I think Kenny and Priscilla have very positive and supportive attitudes which helps establish such an atmosphere in ELI that it makes it a joy to work in.

Before the semester started, the reading lead teacher contacted me to meet with her to chat to get to know each other and to give me the materials to prepare including a CD Rom with archived materials, some hard copies of the most useful documents to help me prepare my course schedule and syllabus, access to the ELI Resource website, and the ELI handbook. As a new teacher, I was encouraged to use the models to base my materials on. They said that later on, when we are more experienced ELI teachers, we can try out more novel ideas, if we so wish to do so. At the last TESOL convention in Seattle,

a UH graduate student organized for the UH past and present people to go to dinner together. While there, I met several interesting people. When I was talking with one young lady who graduated from our program a few years ago and who used to teach at HELP, I mentioned how nice it was in the ELI has we have the CD Rom of archived materials so that we do not have to reinvent the wheel and that we share materials readily. She commented that we are lucky because that kind of collaboration is not common and that we are lucky. She mentioned that where she works now, some teachers share materials, but it is a rather touchy situation and there is not an organized archive like we have in the ELI.

For teachers in the first semester of the ELI, either Kenny or Priscilla observe them teaching two subsequent lessons and then have a meeting with the teacher to ask them questions about how they felt the lesson went and to provide their own feedback as well. This is very useful to encourage self-reflection and to help teachers develop. I really like the way the ELI has many steps set up to help a new teacher learn the ropes of teaching in their program. There are some things that teachers in the first semester in the ELI need to do, such as have a brief appointment with Kenny to show him our record keeping system. They encourage us to ask other ELI teachers about their record keeping system and decide which one to use ourselves. Kenny can provide additional help if needed. This type of scaffolding is extremely helpful to help teachers transition. Establishing an organized way of keeping records is a necessary component for being an ELI teacher.

Throughout the semester, there are numerous announcements made by email in the ELI. This is an effective means of communicating such messages. Kenny mentioned

that some time ago, there were more meetings for everybody together in the ELI, but that is no longer necessary thanks to the convenience of email.

Curricula Area Meetings take place about every month in the ELI. There is a lead teacher who sets the agenda, which she announces by email in advance. She also encourages us to suggest topics to be added to the agenda. I am impressed with the usefulness of these meetings. At the appropriate time in the meeting, when prompted if we have any issues in the area of X, I often mention a challenge that I had encountered. Hearing ideas and suggestions from the other reading teachers and the lead teacher is extremely useful.

### **File sharing**

Sometimes I email other reading teachers with questions or requests, for example, for next semester, I am thinking about changing the order of which I cover the textbook chapters. I emailed the other two teachers who were teaching ELI 82 Advanced Reading this semester, and they cordially provided me with the requested documents. Also, if I create or come across a useful document, I share it with them as well. This weekend we will meet and one of the other ELI teachers who taught an ELI 82 online this semester will tutor a couple of us on how to use WebCT and will share the template with us so that it will be easy for us to just upload our documents. These are further examples of the collaborative mentality of ELI teachers. As is stated in the book that we are currently using for the SLS Program Administration class mentions, “The strength of a program derives from the intellectual power of its faculty and their capacity for effective teaching, research, and service” (Christison and Stoller, p. 133, 1997)

### **Office space**

There are usually 3-4 GAs per office. We are lucky actually because I heard that some GAs, in the Linguistics Department at Georgetown University for example, do not have an office at all. Having an office on campus is beneficial in so many ways. I am a social person, so I enjoy being around people. This year, office assignments were based on curriculum area, so I share an office with two other reading teachers. This is very helpful because if we have questions about teaching reading (or other things), we can ask them in person and get immediate feedback.

#### Proximity

I just realized that most of my closest friends in our department are in the ELI, probably because our offices are next to each other and we usually see each other in the hall and often take a minute to chat. Because we know each other well, sometimes I ask ELI teachers in other areas for tips. For example, the other day I asked Sarah about how she does meetings with students.

#### **Professional Development Assignment**

In the ELI, one of our duties is to do a professional development assignment. There are numerous possibilities of what we can do. In the first semester, new ELI teachers are required to observe two ELI teachers and take notes on the observation form handout. For continuing teachers, there are myriad choices. In the attached document, you can see the suggestions that Priscilla mentions, however she also added that those are just a few ideas, and that the possibilities are virtually endless. This is yet another example of how the ELI provides us with opportunities for growth. By providing us with so many interesting choices and encouraging us to suggest others if we like, this helps empower us to take responsibility for our own learning. Sharing power in encouraging

professional development is key because it enables individuals to have the most control over their own personal development (Christison and Stoller, 1997). Brighton (1965) eloquently states, “The best and only effective motive for change is one that comes from within” (p. 25). Tack and Patititu point out that the right to be intellectually autonomous and to learn independently is valued by faculty (1992). It is also very useful that in the document explaining the professional development options, it points out that we can add the document that we create into our own teaching portfolio and we can consider that goal when writing.

### **Encouraging attending conferences**

This semester I attended the annual TESOL convention in Seattle, which meant that I needed to miss about a week of school. Normally, GAs in the ELI are allotted one day on which they can have a substitute. Attending the conference meant that I would miss two days when I was to teach. I mentioned this very early and received positive feedback from Kenny and the green light to attend the conference. Luckily I had somebody who was able to substitute teach for me on the days when I was absent. If I did not have such a supportive boss, maybe it would not have been possible to get leave from work to attend a conference such as this. Attending the conference was extremely beneficial. I love attending conferences in order to hear fascinating presentations, network, talk to others and finding out about their teaching and research institutions. In the future, I will try to present at such conferences so that I can apply for funding from the Graduate Student Association or Ruth Crymes Fund.

### **Teacher Training**

Sometimes there are graduate students in the SLS department who would like to work as interns, i.e. work with an ELI teacher to learn in detail what it is really like to teach in the ELI. Coopering ELI teachers should have already taught one semester before having the extra responsibility of working with an intern. At the beginning of this semester, I was asked if I would be willing to work with an intern. I was given a document explaining what this entails, including ideas and suggestions. I agreed to work with an intern this past semester and I am glad that I did because it provided me a chance to have somebody to talk with a couple of times a week about the lessons in detail and to do some teacher training. I think it was a useful experience, although it could have been better. Maybe it was partially my fault for not taking more time to plan how to help integrate the intern more in the class. I could have planned ways to use the scaffolding approach to gradually increase the intern's responsibility. It would have been good to meet regularly a day or two before the lessons to discuss and go over the lesson plan and to show her the papers I had given feedback on. If I have an intern again in the future, I will try to do a better job of planning more in advance and meeting with them regularly in advance to discuss the lesson plan. Actually, this semester I had a very full schedule, which is why it was challenging for me to plan more how to integrate the intern. I think that she also had a rather busy schedule and felt hesitant because English is her L2. I often asked her if she had ideas of if and what activities she wanted to do in class. Sometimes she offered me some helpful tips when I asked for feedback, but she did not provide ideas of what she wanted to teach in class. Again, maybe I should have been more proactive in planning scaffolding to get her more involved. Also, I should examine the explanation sheet about working with an intern more carefully and ask for

suggestions from Kenny, Priscilla, and/or other teachers who have experience in working with an intern for suggestions.

### **The Leader's Role in Encouraging Professional Growth**

Encouraging professional development is a part of empowering faculty because it shows “an eagerness to give faculty members access to new knowledge, and a willingness to allow discoveries made by the faculty to affect the future of the program” (p. 133 Christison & Stoller, 1997). The ELI encourages teachers to be critical about the curriculum and offer suggestions for improving it if they have some useful insight to add.

Since the teachers in the ELI are all graduate students, there is a high turnover rate. Most MA students graduate within 5 semesters and usually don't start teaching in the ELI until their second semester or later. Therefore, for MA students, the longest they would usually be in the ELI is four semesters. Also, people who teach in the ELI may teach a different course, either in the same curriculum area or in a different one, so that would mean even less time to delve into improving the curriculum. PhD students take much longer for their studies and subsequently can teach longer. I inferred that this is one of the reasons why it is usually a PhD student who is the lead teacher. This semester I taught ELI 82 for the second time. Yes, it was easier teaching the same course a second time, so I was able to spend more time to try to make some improvements in my teaching and to revise some of the documents for the course assignments. This semester I was also taking SLS 620 on Teaching Second Language Reading, in which we read about many research projects and had a good choice of projects to choose from. For my class projects, I chose to focus on noting what areas I plan to improve on in teaching the same course again next semester. I also provided some lesson plans. I was delighted that I could

choose a practical assignment for my project. Luckily I will be able to teach this class again next semester, so I will be able to implement the improvements in teaching this course.

### **Administrators as role models in professional development**

“Administrators should model good practice through their own active study and participation in professional organizations and events” (p. 133, Christison & Stoller, 1997). The administrators in the ELI do this. Kenny attends the annual TESOL convention regularly. Also, he co-leads a seven part workshop series called TiPPS, Teacher Portfolio and Preparation Series, <http://www.lll.hawaii.edu/sltcc/tipps/> which I participated in during my first semester and found to be very useful. Also, I enjoyed seeing his teaching style. In my first semester, I also enjoyed attending a weekly meeting of a group that Kenny led on using film in teaching. It was a fun group with a workshop format and he encouraged people to take turns providing material to fuel the workshops. Additionally, I am impressed by Priscilla’s professional development activities. I have gotten to know her better this year because she was also taking SLS 680P Program Administration. It was insightful to hear her comments. I was especially interested in the workshop that she led in that class about conflict resolution. She has been taking classes to work towards a certificate in conflict resolution, which is further evidence of her continuing professional development.

### **Increasing confidence and self-worth**

Looking back over the past year in which I was studying in my first year of the MA program in SLS and also teaching in the ELI, I realize that I have grown a great deal. When people ask me what I do, I am proud to say that I am a graduate student in the

Second Language Studies department at University of Hawaii and that I also teach Academic Reading in the English Language Institute to international students. I am truly enjoying both of these roles, teaching and studying at the same time. I cannot imagine how much different life would be by only studying. The past few years when I was only teaching and not studying, I quite missed studying. I sometimes felt frustrated, especially when I was teaching four or six hours a day. I yearned to learn how to be a better teacher. Whenever I attended professional development workshops or conventions, I learned a great deal and loved every minute of it. I really enjoy professional development.

Being in the ELI with its supportive atmosphere and collaborative work ethic has been extremely rewarding. As I explained earlier in this paper, we are provided with excellent materials and a helpful network of people we can turn to for help. Teaching in the ELI has been an empowering experience for me. It has helped me gain confidence in teaching because my supervisors and colleagues are all so encouraging. I am constantly learning how to become a better teacher and have the opportunity to implement these improvements immediately.

Working in the ELI at the same time as being a graduate student is also helping me develop important life skills, such as become more disciplined, learn to manage time more efficiently, how to set priorities, how to work well with others, how to communicate clearly speaking and in writing, how to plan ahead more, and the importance of organization and balance. By having to balance schoolwork and teaching, I feel like I am learning to become more responsible, which also helps increase my confidence. Additionally, having the positive peer pressure of others working hard at studying and teaching around me encourages me to do well in both of these areas. As

previously mentioned, because we share offices and our offices are near each other, I am often surrounded with others who are also working hard in studying and teaching.

Interacting with these peers really helps motivate me to be a good student and be a good teacher. Sometimes when I am around other friends who are not graduate students, it is difficult for them to understand why we are always so busy. I think the SLS department is probably more demanding than many other MA degree programs here and elsewhere.

Yes, it is challenging, but our program also has the world-renowned reputation. I am very grateful for having the opportunity to study and teach here. There is nothing else I would rather be doing and nowhere else where I would rather be doing it.

#### **REFERENCES:**

Brighton, S. (1965). *Increasing your accuracy in teacher evaluation*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Christison, M.A. & Stoller, F.L., Eds. (1997). *A Handbook for Language Program Administrators*. Burlingame, CA: Alta.

Tack, M. W., & Patitu, C.L. (1992). *Faculty job satisfaction: Women and minorities in peril*. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 4. Washington, D.C: The George Washington University, School of Education and Human Development.

A word document with the Professional Development Activities for ELI is also attached.