# Orientation for ELF Teachers: Lessons Learned

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It is the teachers, their personal beliefs and principles, who largely determine the success of a language program. The teacher orientation process can play a crucial role in influencing their attitudes towards the program as well as increasing teacher performance. The orientation meeting is the first point of induction serving to clarify goals, anticipate problems and identify both resources and support networks. This action research study focuses on the process of familiarizing teachers in a new English as a Lingua Franca Program. The writers discuss how their orientation meeting was conducted and how it might be improved. Data from a postorientation survey, logs of teacher access to a learning management system, email correspondence with teachers, and an end- of-semester questionnaire are shared.

　外国語教育において、個々の信念や理念を持ち合わせた教員こそが、そのプログラムを成功へ導くかどうかの鍵を握っている。その教員のパフォーマンスを最大限に生かすために、教員のオリエンテーションが果たす役割というのは重要である。ま

ずプログラムの目的を明確にすること、考えうる問題を予め確認し、リソース・サポート体制を明示しておくことなどが求められる。本稿は、教員が新設されたELFプログラムに携わっていく過程を調査した実践的研究（アクション・リサーチ）である。教員の為のオリエンテーションがどのように実施されたのか、改善点はどこかという点に関して、アンケート結果、学習管理システム活用の記録、Eメールの内容分析、学期末評価からのデータを基に検証する。

**A**s the starting point of the orientation process for new teachers in a language program, the orientation meeting is an important event that may significantly affect teaching practices in the program. The meeting serves to clarify goals, anticipate problems, and identify available resources and support networks (Richards, 2001). A meeting that is meaningful for teachers is critical because it is the teachers who can contribute greatly to the success of a language program (Richards, 2001). If teachers are going to collaborate effectively with faculty and staff and develop their teaching skills and knowledge, they must receive proper support. The teacher orientation process can play a crucial role in teacher development and performance and can influence the teachers' attitudes towards the program itself (Brown, 1995).

This study reports on the task of orienting a group of part-time teachers to teach in a new tertiary level English language program. Action research was employed to consider to what degree the orientation meeting held before the start of the academic year helped to support teachers and how to conduct a more effective orientation meeting for the next school year.

The orientation meeting was held in March 2013 for new teachers in the English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) Program at Tamagawa University. Tamagawa is a private institution with an enrollment of 8,000 students in seven colleges. The ELF Program was piloted in 2012 with 436 students in two colleges. In 2013, the program served 1,029 students in four colleges and is expected to expand to 1,800 students in five colleges in 2014 when it changes to the Center for English as a Lingua Franca, serving students across the campus. Currently, the program has two main goals: (a) teach English in a way that stresses the use of the language, and (b) raise student English language competency reflected in higher TOEIC scores.

In 2012, four full-time and four part-time instructors taught program classes. In 2013, the number of teachers increased to seven full-time and 19 part-time. The 19 part-time teachers were of diverse nationalities and backgrounds; English was the first language for some and the second for others. All of the teachers had earned degrees at the Masters level, and all but two had degrees in TESOL, Applied Linguistics, or Education. Most of the new teachers were new to Tamagawa University and were working part-time at other universities. In 2014, the number of teachers in the program is expected to rise to nine full-time and approximately 30 part-time.

Not unlike most universities in Japan, which rely heavily on part-time teachers (Nagatomo, 2012), most teachers in this program are employed as part-time teachers on an annual basis. Teachers hired since the fall of 2013 are on yearly contracts renewable for up to 5 years. Such employment conditions, as observed by Altbach (1998, p. 81), have a tendency to create a large body of exploited teachers who "show very little loyalty to the institution." As a result, preparing such a diverse and potentially disengaged group of part-time teachers presents a huge challenge.

## Methodology

We used action research to better our understanding of and affect informed revision of the procedures we utilize, particularly the orientation meeting, to guide and support our part-time instructors in their teaching of English to students in our language program. The methodological process of action research is a spiraling of cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflect-

ing (Stevenson, 1995). The cycles involve analysis, fact-finding, conceptualization, planning, implementation, and evaluation of action (McKernan, 1996).

Data from a postorientation teacher questionnaire (all questionnaires via Survey Monkey), Blackboard learning management system (LMS) access logs, email correspondence between full-time and part-time teachers, and an end-of-semester teacher questionnaire were compiled and analyzed. Our review of the literature concerning the orientation process uncovered few studies that were relevant to the specific context of experienced university teachers teaching in a language program. Although helpful, most of the studies reviewed concerned the induction of 1st-year, in-service schoolteachers. Regular weekly discussions to reflect upon the data and literature findings and to plan our next steps were held between full-time teachers.

## March 2013 Orientation Meeting

The full-time faculty spent 2 weeks of daylong meetings to prepare for the orientation meeting, creating a presentation of slides, which included a Google map of the campus, LMS pages, the tutor system, and the school and program calendars. The meeting was held 2 weeks before the start of the spring semester. The 2-hour meeting was attended by 13 part-time faculty, the seven full-time faculty, three school administration staff, and two technical support staff. Although the teachers were reimbursed for transportation costs, they were not paid to attend. Separate orientations were held for the six part-time instructors who did not attend the meeting.

The goals were to keep the meeting within the 2-hour framework, to be brief and concise, to demonstrate how the LMS can be used effectively, and to direct teachers to the LMS pages that display teaching resources, course materials, a teacher guidebook, semester calendars, location and availability of AV

equipment, and a campus map. The agenda items were program description, staff introductions, Human Resources Department documents, the teacher online guidebook, textbooks and teaching materials, extensive reading, campus map, mailing list, calendar, tutor system, online syllabus and grading system, questions and answers, and a Blackboard LMS orientation. Teachers were given temporary access to the LMS system before the start of classes to acquaint themselves with the system and view the ELF teacher group pages, which provided teaching resources and other ELF program information. In the following sections, we present the data we collected after the orientation meeting and our reflections.

## Teacher Questionnaire Feedback and Our Reflections

Immediately following the meeting, teachers were asked to respond to an online questionnaire regarding the orientation. Nine of the 19 teachers responded to the 9-item (one open, eight closed) survey. Two-thirds of the teachers indicated that they had never taken part in orientation meetings at other universities, and all of them felt the information conveyed to them during the orientation was beneficial. All felt the full-time staff had been supportive during the meeting. When asked specifically about whether more detailed explanation on how to use the LMS would have been beneficial, two-thirds of the teachers agreed. When asked to select from a list of other areas in which additional support would be helpful, teachers chose the grading system, administrative information, and extensive reading. Teachers wrote that they would have preferred receiving program information and materials prior to the meeting and opportunities for one-on-one consultations.

In July 2013, an online end-of-semester questionnaire was administered to the teachers with an 84% (16/19) response rate.

All of the teachers agreed they were confident in conveying the goals of the program, and a majority agreed they were satisfied with the support they received in the program. Two teachers asked for more opportunities for teachers to collaborate and share ideas.

Feedback from teachers after the orientation and at the end of the semester indicated that the teachers appeared satisfied with the support they had received. Our observations told us that some teachers work unaided but others ask a range of questions. This experience corroborates the observation of Trowler and Knight (1999) that each teacher has very different needs. It has been suggested by a number of studies into teacher orientation that gaps in understanding are usually filled through informal social interactions between teachers (Abbott, Moran, & Clarke, 2009; Fenton-Smith & Torpey, 2013; Hobson et al., 2009; Yang, 2009). What is more, these studies all revealed that it was these informal social relationships between teachers that appear to be the most useful for their personal training and professional development. In addition to building on the teachers' positive perceptions of program support, our review of the studies on teacher orientation indicates that we need to consider how to create opportunities for our teachers to establish relationships with each other.

Our next meeting will involve both new and experienced full-time and part-time teachers. Additionally then, to ensure information is effectively transferred between teachers, we need to establish pathways for communication between new teachers and their more experienced colleagues. Mentoring is suggested as a way to create these networks (Howe, 2006; Trowler & Knight, 1999). Trowler and Knight (1999) advised establishing multiple mentors and carefully choosing mentors who would have high compatibility with a new staff member. In their review of the induction for new EFL teachers in Turkey, Öztürk and Yıldırım (2012) recommended senior colleagues support newer staff by focusing on the concerns or questions raised by new staff. Brown (1995) noted that involving experienced teachers in the orientation meeting would make the experienced teachers more motivated to attend the orientation meeting, and more importantly, this new role would challenge their views and understanding of the program. To summarize, our literature review and reflections suggest that our next orientation meeting should encourage communication between new and experienced part-time teachers and also establish mentoring roles for full-time faculty in the program.

## Other Teacher Feedback and Our Reflections

The 13 new teachers who attended the orientation meeting were given temporary access privileges to the LMS. In the 2-week period between the meeting and the beginning of classes, logs of access to the LMS showed that the LMS pages were viewed an average of 24 times. Four teachers did not enter the LMS and seven teachers clicked on the pages fewer than 12 times. The most frequently visited pages displayed course materials (31% of clicks), teacher resources (22%), and the teacher guidebook (17%). The access logs tell us that 11 out of the 13 teachers who attended the orientation did not acquaint themselves with the program information made available on the LMS or only very briefly did so. This apparent unwillingness to use the LMS appears to echo Fenton-Smith and Torpey's (2013) finding that new teachers were more inclined to use online support services only after they had become familiar with the curriculum and identified their students' needs. This suggests that we need to more carefully consider the LMS training component in the orientation meeting.

The teachers received official LMS usernames and passwords when the school year began. However, the access logs show that a majority of the teachers still did not utilize the LMS extensively in the first 2 weeks of classes. During this period the teachers clicked

on the pages an average of 24 times. Almost half of the teachers clicked on the pages less than 10 times. The most popular pages were those for teacher resources (40%), course materials (19%), and the teacher guidebook (15%). The pages most visited were those addressing the practical teaching concerns that teachers have at the beginning of a semester in a new work environment.

As practical teaching issues were prevalent themes in teacher searches of the LMS, so were they in teacher email exchanges with program coordinators. Emails received from part-time teachers during the period between the orientation meeting and the end of the first month of classes were collated and then analyzed for key themes. Many of the most frequently occurring words—class, textbook, students, and syllabus—were related to classroom operations.

The Blackboard LMS access and email data suggest to us that new teachers are most interested in learning how they can teach effectively on the first day of class. Fenton-Smith and Torpey (2013) reported that teachers were most critical of course-related information being scheduled late in the meeting. The authors argued that "a bedrock principle for those planning orientation programs is to provide course information in a timely manner" (p. 17). Respondents in their study sought more information on issues such as syllabus information, teaching expectations, course explanations, and lesson examples. One third of teachers who responded to our postorientation questionnaire commented that they wanted to receive more class-related information before the orientation. In addition, our analysis of postorientation emails received from the teachers, as noted above, revealed that their questions were centered on teaching issues. Furthermore, on the few occasions when part-time teachers accessed the LMS after the orientation meeting, the pages with the highest amount of traffic were those related to teacher resources, course materials, and the teacher guidebook. To avoid our meeting becoming what Stirzaker (2004) described as an uninspired

dumping of information, we have to consider where our teachers' priorities lie and plan accordingly.

Instead of providing handouts relating to the different resources and facilities available on campus to teachers, Streich (2013) advocated physically guiding new staff in how to access them. Fenton-Smith and Torpey (2013) reported that respondents to their study sought a detailed campus tour and map. Although unplanned, we offered a walking tour of the campus to participants after our orientation meeting. Teachers who joined in reported that this experience was either excellent (56%), good (22%), or average (22%). Our leaders of these walking tours reported that the informal nature of this component enabled individual questions to be answered and built informal relationships between new teachers. These findings further strengthen the idea that when teachers come to our orientation meeting, their main goal is to learn how they can be ready to teach their classes from the first day.

## Ongoing Support for Teachers and Our Reflections

Following the orientation meeting, a series of workshops were scheduled for the part-time instructors. The first workshop, attended by 13 teachers in late May, was held to explain the LMS functions, including how to make announcements, how to create tests and quizzes, and how to input and keep a record of student grades. The next workshop, held in early July and attended by 17 teachers, was a briefing on how to administer the TOEIC IP test. The last workshop, also held in July, was attended by 16 teachers who were taught how to navigate the university online grading system and briefed about the end-of-semester teacher and student questionnaires.

The follow-up workshops were planned because we had information to pass to the teachers that we were unable to include

in the initial 2-hour orientation. Both Stirzaker (2004) and Brown (1995, p. 181) recommended administrators stage multiple orientations because "there is only a certain amount of information a human being can absorb." Teachers who participated in the orientation meeting described by Fenton-Smith and Torpey (2013) received class-relevant instruction after receiving a flood of administrative information. As a result, participants complained that they were already cognitively overloaded before the time came to process class-relevant information, the area that they were most interested in hearing about. One participant in our orientation commented similarly, "Information was a bit fast and concentrated."

For our 2014 meeting, we need to take steps to ensure our teachers do not experience cognitive overload and design an agenda that presents the information our teachers want to hear when they are most able to process it. Another consideration is our pacing. We should create time for informal question-and-answer sessions and give teachers opportunities to process the information they receive. Streich (2013) and Stirzaker (2004) also recommended allowing ample time for small group discussions, which would help to break up the one-way dissemination of information and establish collaborative relationships between individuals.

An additional strategy to help alleviate the problem of information overload is to share relevant teaching and administration information before the orientation meeting. Fenton-Smith and Torpey (2013) and Yang (2009) recommended that information should be distributed prior to the orientation meeting and that steps must be taken to present information in a way that is easy for teachers to understand. This issue was also mentioned by a third of the respondents to our postorientation questionnaire, who asked to receive more information prior to the orientation meeting.

## Plan for the 2014 Orientation Meeting

Based on our data analysis, observations, and reflections since the first orientation, we have decided on some steps needed to effectively orient our teachers at our next meeting.

### *Encourage Teacher Interaction*

Firstly, we have considered how we can establish social relationships between teachers at the very start of the meeting. We plan to provide nametags and allow time for informal introductions as well as refreshment breaks to enhance the informal element. We also plan to strategically allot seating positions to new and experienced teachers in the meeting room. To promote mentoring, we intend to involve experienced part-time teachers in planning the orientation, and we hope the strategic seating arrangements will set the stage for mentoring relationships to be established.

In our new agenda we will include time for informal discussion between staff. There will be a campus tour at the end of our orientation meeting. Again, specific groups will be created in advance to enable new social relationships to be formed between experienced teachers, new teachers, and administrative staff. We hope that this tour will provide an informal opportunity to enhance relationships between staff members. In addition, the experienced teachers leading these tours will be asked to use the experience as an informal focus group where they solicit feedback concerning how much information was internalized during the meeting.

### *Accommodate Teacher Needs and Avoid Information Overload*

Although the orientation meeting is one of the few times when all ELF teachers gather in one place, we have to resist the temptation to give too much information. We plan to distribute

textbooks and class information to teachers prior to the meeting. Our agenda will be adjusted to meet the information needs of our new teachers and reduce cognitive demands. For example, information related to day-to-day teaching rather than overall program and school administration details will be prioritized. Moreover, day-to-day teaching information will be included at the start of the agenda, when teachers are fresh. Considering what we have learned from the literature on inductions and our teachers' LMS usage at the start of the semester, we have decided to limit our LMS agenda to login procedures for the school intranet and LMS system. A more detailed LMS training session will be provided for all teachers during the semester, and this event will be promoted at the orientation meeting.

### *Support Professional Development of Teachers*

In order to refine the training program for ELF teachers, we will take a number of steps to foster their professional development, as we believe this directly relates to the teachers' commitment to our program and the quality of their classes. To understand the needs of the teachers we will implement another postorientation questionnaire. This time we will more strongly encourage all teachers to respond. For teachers who are unable to attend and for our reflection purposes, we will record the orientation meeting on video. In addition to the LMS workshop, other training opportunities for teachers will be planned in advance, and these events will be promoted at the meeting.

Studies recommended that an effective induction for new teachers should have a personal development component, which includes the development of teaching skills, networks for social and professional support, and the creation of assignments or tasks (Howe, 2006; Öztürk & Yıldırım, 2012). We have received requests from teachers after the workshops and via the end-of-semester teacher questionnaire for opportunities for teachers to get together and share lesson ideas and teaching

strategies. Yang (2009) suggested that informal teacher conversations and discussions can be effective in the teacher orientation process. With Yang's suggestion in mind, we will try to create an environment for more of these interactions to take place. We are adding informal discussions to our current training meetings and we will continue providing opportunities for part-time teachers to meet with full-time staff to receive LMS support. We also plan to create more professional development opportunities for teachers, including inviting teachers to share their teaching ideas and research in ELF teacher forums and journals. In fact, both a forum and a journal will be introduced in 2014.

In addition to face-to-face interactions, an ELF teachers' blog has been created on the LMS to support the sharing of ideas. So far it has mainly been the full-time faculty who have contributed. We would like to encourage more part-time teachers to use this opportunity and generate ideas on how this platform can be more effectively utilized to support teachers' professional development.

## Conclusion

We have reported on our action research into how we can effectively stage an orientation meeting for new part-time teachers in a tertiary ELF program. Although feedback from teachers after the first semester of classes revealed a very positive response, our study has uncovered a number of areas for improvement. We recognize that the orientation meeting plays a crucial role in the creation of positive working relationships between teachers, and we need to address this issue more thoroughly. In view of teachers' professional development needs, we acknowledge that the orientation meeting is important but is only part of the process of enabling our teachers to make a positive contribution. By taking more time to invest in our teachers, we are investing in the success of our ELF program.

## Bio Data

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