

C E L E
A Decade of Progress
and
A Vision for the 21st Century

Coordinating Across the Continuum

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History of The Center for English Language Education

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Transforming The English Language Program
at Asia University: A Background Glance

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While the 10th anniversary of the Freshman English Program is naturally a time for reflection, it is also a time to take stock and look forward, fine-tune the program and consider areas of change. Early in the year we began pouring over the many facets of our program, looking at what works well, areas where we can improve, and innovations, which would enrich our teaching. As the year comes to a close we are looking at what we have accomplished and what remains for the year ahead. And we prepare for the transition between the two.

In a program where teachers move on every one to three years, a unique annual ritual establishes itself. While preparing the next year's incoming teachers for their arrival and giving relocation assistance to those departing, we find ourselves living in both the past and the future, somehow trying to create a smooth link between the two. Grades are submitted, projects are completed and departing teachers sift through the debris which inevitably accumulates over one to three years of living and teaching. While our senior students are moving on to new lives, our own departing teachers are clearing out their desks and apartments, passing on items to those remaining. Other giveaway items pile up on the central worktable in the Center and in the hallways at the teacher's residence. Remaining teachers shift into desks and apartments vacated by those leaving. The Director and I compose letters of recommendation, noting the many accomplishments and contributions of departing faculty members. Then, within weeks, new instructors arrive, some anxious, nearly all tired. In time, these teachers will hit their stride, question the status of things, and infuse their own energy of change and evolution into the program.

As I prepare for my second year as the Coordinator for the Center for English Language Education, clearing out my own files and reorganizing for the months ahead, I am reminded of a course in archives that I attended as a graduate student of history. Although it took only a few classes regarding warehousing temperatures, shelving specifics and disposal options to convince me that I would not be an archivist, I did leave the course with greater insight into the actual basis of history. I learned that what remains of the past is largely determined by what is preserved in matter and mind and by those who determine what is saved and what is lost or destroyed. In this age of copious information, I wondered how much more is being lost than saved. As if to underscore this impression, I recently viewed a list of CELE teachers reaching back to 1988, 104 teachers in all. I first noted those instructors whom I know personally, then those whose names are familiar and live on in department lore. Then I came to those whose names were unfamiliar to me, who have been lost over time from the oral history of the department, teachers who came and touched the lives of their students and then went quietly on with their next venture. The details of this evolutionary line of the institution are obscured and crowded out by daily challenges of teaching and administrating and the age-old dynamics of cross-cultural exchange. When incoming teachers, and even those returning for another year or two, suggest a new innovation in

teaching or administration, the rationale for the status quo naturally comes into question. And often, the full answers to these questions reach back to those founders, teachers, and administrators who have labored to realize the program and keep it as solid and vibrant as it is today. Sometimes, the answers are completely unreachable. Never documented, they belong to those who have slipped from department memory.

When I now approach the overflowing filing cabinets, I do so with a new reverence. I am forced to weed out that which is no longer necessary to the daily running of the department. Yet, as the Center's "archivist", what do I toss out? What do I relegate to storage? What becomes of those reams of documentation on prior generations of placement tests (representing endless hours of labor and research), memos regarding ever-evolving departmental policies aimed at improving instruction and the professional and personal existence of CELE instructors, and minutes of meetings which decided issues crucial to the moment but no longer relevant? I receive an education from these old papers. They show me how our current successes are built upon the efforts of those who have gone before. They tell me where we've come from, the work involved, and oftentimes, the reasoning behind it all. I can see that the process is the point and that the past exists in the present. It is the annual influx of new minds, adapting & upgrading the work of their predecessors, that keeps our instruction fresh and allows us to grow. What seems a shift in a department of continual shifts is actually an annual ritual vital to the growth of our program and the quality of education for our students. And ultimately, my job becomes that of coordinating the past with the present and future, preserving the foundation without stifling our evolution.