

Rika Yoshisako
Akifuchu Senior High School

Reporting on Training

Preface

I still remember the first day we arrived in Hawaii with anxiety and excitement. We met Mr. Tsurutani and Mr. Harris, who were coordinators of this program, at Honolulu International Airport, then we started the splendid teacher training program at KCC. This program provided me with a lot of opportunities to expose myself to English, expand my knowledge of English teaching and have good communication with people. Within the limited period of three weeks, I learned a lot from the people around me as well as the staff at KCC. I would like to review what I learned, what I felt and what I noticed in this report.

Introduction of the University of Hawaii Kapi'olani Community College(KCC)

KCC is located on the slopes of Diamond Head crater and just minutes from Waikiki. The campus was designed to blend with its beautiful natural surroundings. KCC has more than 7,600 students from about 35 countries with variety of backgrounds, and provides various academic courses, including excellent ESL programs. One of their unique courses is Culinary Arts. The students there are provided with practical training, being in charge of the cafeteria and restaurant on the campus.

KCC also has a lot of great staff, and they gave us a hearty welcome. At the opening ceremony of this program, Dr. Pagotto, who was the vice president of KCC, told us that they could also learn by accepting us and it helped them to *Kulia I ka nu'u* "Strive for the Highest". I was impressed by their positive attitude and the idea "Strive for the Highest", and I felt that I had much to learn from them not only as a learner but also as a teacher.

Classes

The class consisted of mainly three parts : English Language Teaching Workshop, Advanced Language Development Seminar, and Issues in Education Seminar. The final goals of this program were to design and present a content-based unit for our English classes, to carry out a mini-research project related to trends and issues in English teaching, and to make a formal oral presentation of the research project using Power Point.

Content-Based Instruction

At the first lecture with Prof. Malm, the concept of Content-Based Instruction(CBI) was introduced. It is a second-language program in which lessons are organized around topics, themes, or subject matter rather than language points. It is considered to be an effective language instruction method because it includes an integration of language skills, natural and

meaningful communication, a variety of activities and information sources connected by a coherent theme, and so on. Various approaches and activities based on CBI were presented throughout the workshop, and they gave me plenty of ideas to improve my classes.

Brainstorming activity

First of all, a “Brainstorming Activity” was introduced by Prof. Malm. In this activity we wrote down whatever thoughts came into our minds in order to collect as many ideas as possible. There are no right or wrong answers, so the participants feel free to write and share the ideas. The first topic was “My biggest challenges and problems in the classroom...” After sharing our ideas, Prof. Malm summarized them on the sheet. Some of the problems mentioned during the activity were as follows :

Classes are always teacher-centered and based on grammar translation.

Students limit their responses to memorized formulaic phrases. (Don’t create original opinions)

Students can’t write proper sentences. (word order, etc.)

The topics were well-organized to make the objectives of this program clear, followed by some more topics, such as “some successful techniques that I have used to help my students learn English...(Analysis of our own teaching)”, “ My students are interested in...(Analysis of our students)” and “My goals for the next two weeks. What I want to learn. What I want to improve. Information I want to find.(Raising awareness of the problem and setting goals). It was not easy to answer these questions. However, by answering these questions I was able to review my classes and myself. What I thought about through this activity became useful later when I decided the topic of my research paper.

Various kinds of communicative activities

A great many activities which made the classes more student-centered and communicative were presented and we practiced some of them. The most impressive ones I experienced were the “strip story” activity and the “poster session” activity. The “strip story”, which requires the participants to restructure a story using pieces of information memorized by each one, is a kind of group activity. It can promote student-student interaction. We were involved in this activity, using negotiation of meanings in English in order to understand clearly. That created a real communication in the classroom.

The “poster session”, on the other hand, is a presentation activity. We made an impromptu presentation about aspects Japanese culture, such as sushi, Japanese artists and Japanese sweets, with the posters that the students at KCC had already made. Although we could do it only once, in Prof. Malm’s classes she made four or five groups of audience members so that presenters could make the same presentation repeatedly. As a result, presenters got used to making presentations and found themselves improving in speaking. This method seemed to be effective to enhance speaking fluency.

There were many activities that I had already known. However, I found those activities

could be more communicative when we had a student-centered point of view. Reflecting on my own teaching method, which was nothing but teaching “the textbook”, I thought I should create more communicative lessons using the textbooks.

Writing Activities and effective feedback

Prof. Malm also required us to write a journal everyday as a writing assignment. Some of the topics were related to English teaching: “What is the Japanese students’ attitude toward learning English?”, “What are the strengths and weaknesses of English teaching in Japan?”, “What are your goals as an English teacher? and so on. She told us to write 10-minute journals, but it took a lot more time to write about such topics. Those questions were also effective in raising awareness of issues, analyzing the situation, and thinking of the teachers’ roles.

In addition, in the last lesson with Prof. Malm, she returned these writing assignments with some samples of evaluation on them. They varied from one with only grammatical corrections to one with empathic comments. So we realized how students feel about the teacher’s feedback. Encouraging students with positive feedback is necessary to motivate students to write. As far as error correction is concerned, teachers should focus on specific points like “tense” or “word order” so students learn to be conscious about grammatical points. We teachers should vary our feedback to suit the purpose of the writing.

Phonetics and phonology in the Content-based Language Programs

The lecture about phonetics and phonology by Prof. Nguyen was quite interesting. As I had not studied these areas for years, the lecture was helpful to reconfirm what I knew about the sound system. When I tried some exercises using information gaps, I had trouble discriminating between vowels, such as “rub” vs. “rob” or “hut” vs. “hat”. Even though I had the knowledge of the sound system, it was difficult to tell the difference. I realized the importance of pronunciation practice for myself. It is necessary for me to acquire the habit of listening and pronouncing consciously.

Issues in Education Seminar

Overview of the Public Education System in Hawaii

We had a chance to visit the Board of Education in Hawaii and heard about the public education system in Hawaii. The first public school system was established in 1840, and there are 285 public schools on seven islands. At present, the average number of pupils per teacher is twenty five and school counselors assigned to every school support pupils mentally. Since Hawaii has accepted large numbers of immigrants, there are many ethnic groups in schools. Occasional conflicts between them are some of the issues in schools; the chronic shortage of teachers in public schools in Hawaii is another important issue. This is quite different from the case in Japan. It was not surprising that there were so many differences between Hawaii and Japan, though, I thought that we had the same kind of issues. Both in Hawaii and in

Japan, it was the case that children and the environment surrounding children had changed, which caused various problems.

Research Project and Presentation

While listening to lectures about content-based instruction, I felt strongly the necessity of a communicative approach to my classes. I thought it was desirable that I apply some interactive activities to the units of the textbook in order to integrate language skills. Therefore, I set up the topic as follows: “Increasing Communicative Competence through Interactive and Cooperative Activities in the English Classroom.” I researched the effective activities and roles of teachers and created a teaching plan for my demonstration based on the topics.

As we didn't have enough time to search for references, Prof. Malm gave us a lot of information about the topic. Prof. Donnes also gave us some advice about effective presentations using Power Point. Supported by the staff at KCC I completed the research project. Also, seven staff members participated in our presentation on the last day and they gave us various reflections and ideas. It was challenging to create a situation in which English is used as a means of real communication in an English classroom in Japan. I got the suggestion that the use of a medium like the Internet could be one clue to solving the problem.

Extra curricular activities

The most impressive experience apart from the classes at KCC was the home-stay. In the middle of the program, a two-day home-stay program was arranged for us. It was the best opportunity for us to know about life in Hawaii, understand the culture and deepen mutual understanding through communication. I stayed with a family of four, including two babies. The husband, Eric, is a pilot and Kim is a housewife who used to be an ESL teacher. They are a good couple sharing the housework and childrearing of their small children. Their son, Ryan, is three years old and their daughter Ashley is one year old. Although they were busy rearing small children, they accepted me and treated me as a member of their family. I really appreciated it. I had a good time with them. Since Kim had experience as a teacher, we had a lot to share and sympathize with each other about. She told me her philosophy as a language (Italian) teacher that having the students learn proper pronunciation motivates them and helps them feel confident in the target language. I agreed with that point.

As far as language is concerned, it was also interesting to see how small children were acquiring English. Ashley talked baby talk, like “fishy” for “fish” while Kim was showering a great many meaningful words on her step-by-step. When Ashley was in a blue basket, for example, Kim repeatedly said to her “basket”, “in the basket”, “in the blue basket” and “ Ashley is in the blue basket.” On the other hand, Ryan, who had already acquired the basic words and phrases, tried to use polite expressions to suit the situation, like “May I have another steak, please?” I realized that parents play an important role in children's language

acquisition. That is true of all languages.

Kim also mentioned that the merit of living in a multi-cultural society was being able to learn from other cultures and adopt some aspects of other cultures to one's life. Kim was interested in Japanese culture and asked me many questions. Her positive attitude toward different cultures inspired me to learn more about Hawaiian culture. It is important for us to try to know others in order to deepen mutual understanding.

Conclusion

I experienced the Content-Based Instruction on the theme, "English Education" throughout this seminar and could improve my English ability by integrating the four skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. During the workshop I played the roles of both a teacher and a student, which was useful for me to understand students' feeling and to confirm the important role of teachers as facilitators. I found that students are encouraged to learn positively by teachers' effective feedback. I'd like to reflect on this point.

Prof. Malm said that it was surprising to find students could do well in the activities that teachers thought were too difficult. Teachers should lead students step-by-step in order to have them achieve their goals. It is also necessary for teachers to try to see how things work instead of hesitating to do so. It is my challenge to apply what I learned at the seminar to my English classes.

This three-week seminar made me feel strongly that I should learn English more actively and improve my English ability. That was the biggest outcome of this program. It is essential to expose myself to English on a daily basis. It is also important to be conscious of output as well as input. I am a teacher of English and a learner of English at the same time, so I'd like to take every opportunity to use English as a means of communication.

Last of all, I'd like to thank the Hiroshima Board of Education and KCC for giving me a chance to join this program.