

Kiyoko Yagai
Hiroshima Inokuchi High School

Reporting on Training

1. Introduction

I participated in the Hiroshima Board of Education Teacher Training Program at Kapi'olani Community College (KCC) of the University of Hawaii from July 20th to August 9th 2010. Before going to Hawaii, I felt excited because it was going to be my first visit to Hawaii, my first studying abroad, and my first homestay. Everything was new to me. However, at the same time I was very nervous because I wasn't sure if I really could get through this difficult program. There were several reasons why I applied for this program: first, I wanted to improve my English and English teaching ability; second, I wanted to learn new presentation skills in English; and third, I wanted to learn a lot about Hawaii before going back on a school trip to Hawaii with my students in October. Now that I have finished the whole program, I'd like to look back on the training and organize my thoughts about what I learned at KCC.

2. Program Content

KCC is located at the foot of Diamond Head in a rich natural environment. Every morning on my way to the school cafeteria from the bus stop, I enjoyed the beautiful cactus gardens. I would sometimes see a rainbow over the mountain and mongooses running through the cactus gardens. At the center of the campus there's a big lawn and every time I went outside after the morning classes, I saw the bright flush of green from the lawn. I felt lucky to study for three weeks in a place surrounded by such a beautiful environment.

In this program, after we finished the workshops and seminars (English Language Teaching Workshop, Advanced Language Development Seminar, Issues in Education Seminar, Computer Lab, etc.) and so on, we were required to accomplish these tasks:

- (1) Write a personal teaching philosophy
- (2) Design a lesson plan and give a demonstration
- (3) Carry out a mini-research project related to English teaching and write a research paper
- (4) Give an oral presentation on the research using PowerPoint

I had a lot of difficulty accomplishing all of these huge tasks within three weeks, but thanks to many people's help, I managed to finish them on time. I'd like to review the process I used to work on them.

2.1 Content-Based Instruction (CBI)

During the first class of the seminar, we were shown a list of terms and asked how many of those terms we were familiar with in relation to current trends in second language instruction. The term "Content-based" was listed. Before attending this seminar, I had heard of "CBI" but I didn't know exactly what it was and until then, I never thought that I'd use it in my English class.

According to Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (1989), "Content-centered Education" is defined as the following: "The integration of content learning with language teaching aims." Furthermore, Professor Malm, who was our main instructor, told us that in a CBI class, teachers present students with a mixture of reading, listening, speaking, writing, grammar and vocabulary activities all connected by a content theme. The aim is to engage students in critical thinking exercises for them to explore the difficult concepts connected to the content theme. Professor Malm also gave us an example on how to design a lesson using CBI at KCC. The content theme was "Civil Rights" and it had some subtopics such as "African American Civil Rights History" or

“Civil Rights of People with Disabilities.” During our learning on how to design a CBI lesson, we did some brainstorming about and asked ourselves: What content areas might work for my class? What are the goals that I would like my students to achieve at the end of my course? Or, how do I think my students would react to the new way to learn? It was interesting and useful for me to learn about not only the specific example of a CBI class but also the advantages and challenges of CBI for both students and teachers. I believe that learning about one theme using many approaches helps students comprehend the theme and acquire the language more effectively.

I think it might be a little difficult to use CBI in its entirety in regular classes like English or Reading because we have to use an authorized textbook and complete it by the end of the school year. However, I can make good use of the concepts and the many kinds of activities in my regular classes. Moreover, it could be possible to take it in a class or a subject created by a school at its own discretion. I wish we had some textbooks containing many stories related to one theme. Then it would be easier for us to design a CBI class.

2.2 Teaching philosophy

During the second week, I started working on my teaching philosophy. The term “Teaching Philosophy” sounds very dignified to me, so at first I didn’t know what to write about. I had recently been under pressure with many job responsibilities, and as a result, I had just taught my classes every day without thinking much about my beliefs or motivations. However, after reading the article “ANNIKERIS--A Research for Students, Teachers, and Parents (2010)”, I realized that writing a teaching philosophy was important for me because self-reflection would result in greater insight into my teaching. Therefore, it was a good chance for me as an English teacher to go back at the starting line and think about my teaching philosophy.

First of all, we were told to have 12 questions in mind that would help us write a teaching philosophy. Then, it was suggested that we choose 3 to 5 questions out of the 12, and use the answers to those questions as maybe they could be helpful for us to write the teaching philosophy. I chose 3 questions out of the 12, which were: Why do I teach? What is the primary goal I have for my students? (related to the school mission of my school)? What motivates students to learn and improve?

When I was writing my teaching philosophy, I had it corrected by Professor Malm over and over again while discussing it with her each time. As I rewrote many drafts based on a lot of feedback, my philosophy paper gradually got better and I finally accomplished this task. The process was called “process writing,” and I realized the benefits of process writing by experiencing it myself.

In the “ANNIKERIS” article, it is also written that, “a teaching philosophy is an ongoing and evolving process. As we grow as professionals, our values will also grow and change.” Therefore, I think I will need to think about my teaching philosophy again in five or ten years from now.

2.3 Demonstration lesson

When I was almost finished my teaching philosophy, I started to engage in making a demonstration lesson plan. I decided to deal with the story “Sugar on Your Table” found in the English textbook I was then using.

Prof. Malm introduced many approaches and activities to me that I could use in my lesson. One of the most interesting ideas was the one about reviewing the vocabulary in a unit. For example, when students review the word “energize” or “ingredient” in the unit, I’ll ask them, “Playing sports energizes me. What energizes you?” or “What ingredients are in *okonomiyaki*?” I think it’s a good way for students to learn because the words stick in their heads more easily.

As I made a demonstration lesson plan, I noticed some perception gaps about student activities I had used in my class. I sometimes made students summarize a unit by filling in blanks with vocabulary from the reading, but Professor Malm pointed out that this was not really a summary activity. According to her, a “true summary” means not filling in blanks but rather, writing sentences to explain the story content using their own words. Moreover, I intended to use a “strip stories” activity, where students rearrange the sentences written on strips of paper in the correct order, as a review exercise. Professor Malm said that this activity should be done at the beginning of a lesson before students read the story yet, and not at the end of a lesson as a review because it wouldn’t do students much good since they are already familiar with the story. These points were new knowledge to me, so I decided I would like to take these activities into my classroom from now on.

I made my lesson plan based on Professor Malm’s useful advice, and gave the demonstration lesson. In the lesson, Professor Malm and my peers played the roles of students and I gave them a vocabulary quiz. I also made them do research on “sugar.” I also enjoyed the other teachers’ lessons and after that we discussed our lesson plans with each other.

2.4 Research paper

We had to finalize our training program by writing a research paper and it was the most important mission for us. Once I decided the theme of my research, I started this brainstorming: what are my biggest challenges and problems in the classroom? As I had been looking for the more efficient teaching practices for my English class through a process of trial and error, I decided to research the theme of “Bridging the gap between student and teacher expectations about reading activities while introducing integrated-skills approaches and making lessons more communicative.”

I normally make a worksheet for my English class and I teach based on the worksheet. A few months ago I changed the form of it because I wanted students to understand information or the writer's intentions quickly and to the point. I also wanted students to grasp the underlying meanings of the text after they had read it once. However, this change was not popular amongst the students. Students wanted me to check the translation of each sentence one by one and to teach grammar more particularly.

After I synthesized the ideas I had learned in the seminar, and some information I had found from the internet or had read in some books about “What is reading?” and “Reading process,” I thought about what activities and approaches could meet the expectations of both my students and myself. I came to the conclusion that taking in many different kinds of activities with integrated skills such as listening to a song relevant to the story, free writing, writing summary, mini-research and poster session, etc. as oppose to focusing on only reading a text, will lead to meeting the students’ expectations.

I think that writing a research paper was the hardest but most challenging task for me. At one stage I was working on three different things at the same time: a teaching philosophy, a lesson plan, and a research paper. I sometimes felt confused. As I didn’t have much time, I am by no means satisfied with my research, but after receiving much advice and feedback from Professor Malm and Dudzik, I managed to complete it and I was happy to feel a sense of accomplishment.

2.5 Presentation

On the last day at KCC we were suppose to give an oral presentation about our research in Power Point. I had never formally studied how to use Power Point before, though I had helped students to do their Power Point presentations. We were behind schedule and it took much time

to write my research paper, so we started out working on our Power Point presentation very late. It was miraculous that I finished it in one or two days. I found it important to choose proper key words or main ideas from the research paper in order to make an effective Power Point presentation. In addition, we needed to be careful that the words used in the research paper were different from the ones used in our speech, so we had to make changes to some words.

At the rehearsal, it seemed that I always looked at the script or the screen. Professor Malm gave me advice to look at the audience and keep smiling. I also learned that voice, gestures, eye-contact, dramatic pause are important factors for a good speech and we should focus on communication, not perfection.

In the afternoon, we gave our presentations at last. Many people got together to listen to our presentations. I was glad to have two guests from DOE, who brought us beautiful leis. I was the last presenter of the three. As the two other teachers had made wonderful presentation before me, I was under terrible pressure. I was nervous but I was as good as I can be during my presentation. Some of the audience members got interested in the university entrance examination system in Japan and asked me about it. We discussed it a little. This experience gave me more confidence in speaking to a live audience in English.

In Inokuchi High School, the second year students are supposed to give an oral English presentation during the period of Integrated Study. I hope I can give them much better advice than I did last year.

3. Off-campus activities

3.1 Visit to DOE (Department of Education)

On the second day of the program, we visited DOE and grasped the overview of the public education system in Hawaii.

Hawaii is now in a severe economic situation and is getting its education budgets cut year after year. The state cannot pay proper salaries to the teachers and as a result, school hours have gotten shorter. I was surprised to hear that currently in Hawaii, schools are closed two Fridays per month, students go to school only 163 days a year, and school ends at 2pm every day.

On that day, before our departure for the DOE, Professor Malm was kind enough to give us some newspaper articles about local issues in the Hawaii education system, so we could prepare some questions based on the articles. I was interested in the article about high school graduation and dropout rate, so I asked the DOE staff about high school entrance examinations. In Hawaii students don't have high school entrance examinations and most of them go to their local schools, but it is said that nowadays more and more students go to private schools in search of better education.

3.2 Homestay

My first homestay made a strong impression on me. I wasn't given much information about my host family in advance, so I was surprised to find that my host father had been a famous major league baseball player who played for the White Sox and other teams. Since I am a big fan of the Hiroshima Carp and I like watching baseball games, I enjoyed talking with him about baseball.

My host mother was experienced with homestay, and she had an extremely positive attitude toward it. On that weekend, they hosted another two students who were from Germany and Switzerland, and I had a good time talking to them. I was surprised at the German girl's fluent English, and to see the two girls talking without any difficulty in German.

Ms. Kohirogawa, one of the KCC program participants, and I spent our homestay periods together because my host mother and Ms. Kohirogawa's host mother were parent and child. Our

host family took us to Kailua Beach, a canoe race, and showed us around Honolulu. In addition, she taught us how to make a lei and told me about Hawaiian culture showing me pictures of her grandson's wedding.

Ms. Kohirogawa brought a tea ceremony set from Japan, so she served tea for the host family and I helped her with it. They seemed to enjoy the taste of tea. Although it was a short stay, I was able to be exposed to the local culture and the atmosphere of an ordinary Hawaiian family.

3.3 Fieldtrip to Plantation Village and Bishop Museum

On August 2nd we went to Plantation Village in the morning and Bishop Museum in the afternoon with Professor Malm.

At Plantation Village, we learned about the history of immigration in Hawaii. I found that Hawaii owed its present prosperity to the painful hardship of immigrants. Many Japanese immigrants moved to Hawaii with a dream that they would earn some money in Hawaii and return back to Japan, but the reality was harsh. Their wages were low and they had to work 10-12 hours a day. However, they helped each other and today they have gained status in Hawaii. In addition, a guide gave us a tour of the houses of immigrants from many countries and it was very interesting because I could see the lifestyles of workers coming from different counties.

At Bishop Museum, the three largest Ku (Hawaii God) images were displayed for a limited time only and we were lucky to see them. After we heard about the lives of working people in the old days, we attended lei-making and Hula lessons. I made a lei by braiding leaves and putting flowers into them. This time, the way I made a lei was different from the way I had learned at my host family. In the Hula lesson, the teacher taught us not only dance but the meanings of each dance movement in detail. Hula was difficult but relaxing. Throughout this field trip, I deepened my understanding of Hawaiian culture.

4 Conclusion

As I said, this was my first visit to Hawaii and my first time studying abroad. Although today we can study English fully in Japan in various ways, I realized that there is no better way to study English than to stay in the country where it is spoken and be totally immersed into it. In Hawaii I enjoyed staying in a different culture, and discovering a lot of new things every day. I often heard people say the word "diversity" or "multi-ethnic heritage" in Hawaii. Hawaii's population consists of many ethnic groups: Caucasian, Japanese descent, Filipino descent, Hawaiian descent, Chinese descent and so on. Hawaii is the most racially integrated state in the USA and people live together peacefully in diversity. I could see this diversity of cultures in food, language, buildings, and ways of life. It was a wonderful experience for me to see and feel this diversity directly.

As for the training program, I struggled with many tasks suffering from lack of sleep every day. However, it was a precious experience to me to focus only on studying English. I would like to treasure what I learned in Hawaii, and give it back to my students and my school from now on.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to the Hiroshima Board of Education that gave me such a precious opportunity and to all the people who helped and supported me during my stay in Hawaii. Furthermore, I cannot thank the program's two teachers enough. Thanks to them I managed to complete this challenging program. I will never forget the days of sorrow and joy that we shared together.