

Hawaii Study Tour : Extending Experiential Learning Opportunities

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要 旨

2000年度より毎年24名前後の短大1年生がハワイ大学短期研修に参加してきた。このプログラムの開始以降、現地で得た経験を元に、情報や人の交流も観られ徐々にではあるが波及効果が生まれつつある状況である。体験的学習の重要性を改めて認識して、その可能性をさらに追求していきたい。

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1. Program background

University departments offering courses of study in language and/or culture also providing opportunities for overseas study has become well established and the same can be said for junior colleges as well. One of the more frequently asked questions posed by visiting high school students concerns the existence of such programs. It was within this climate that the current Hawaii Study Tour was conceived five years ago. Taking advantage of the affiliation that Aichi University has with the University of Hawaii, Leeward Community College (LCC) has become a partner with the junior college in developing and maintaining the program described in this paper. First offered to students who enrolled in the academic year of 2000, the year when the course of study was changed from English Literature to English Communication, this program will soon enter its fifth year.

Another factor which continues to propel this program is the recognized need for more experiential learning opportunities. At recent conferences attended by the author, the need for the integration of experiential learning into the curriculum to further enhance the contents is repeatedly stressed, whether the subject matter is information technology or language education. For language learners, having real-life opportunities to actually engage with the target language can be a highly motivating experience, as participants have remarked themselves. How teachers can develop and further utilize such experiential learning opportunities is discussed below.

2. Program contents

The program consists of language and culture components which are both classroom-bound and experiential in nature. The language component consists of daily morning sessions in which the students are engaged with both conversational skills practice and content-based reading and role play. After students practice asking questions and other exchanging information on topics related to student life, volunteer students of LCC join the classroom session as conversation partners. Everyday, the LCC volunteers, many who participated repeatedly in several sessions, were anxiously awaited and conversation became more and more lively as time went on. As students studying the Japanese language, the volunteers were also keenly interested in interacting with the junior college participants.

In addition to opportunities for conversing with their peers, the participants read the script about a famous court case in Hawaiian history involving issues of native rights and land use. After reading about *Oni vs. Meek*, the students also take on the roles of the characters in the play and practice in the classroom before visiting a courthouse where they then reenact the historical case. After the acting is finished, they are shown exhibits which display how native Hawaiian people used the tidewaters and farmed the land for the ruling monarchs and how this came into conflict with settlers from mainland USA who bought land for grazing. Grappling with concepts unfamiliar to them such as court cases being decided by juries, the students were able to not only experience some role play in the target language but were exposed to history and law.

Experiencing the culture of Hawaii was another element key of this program. Handcrafts and dancing have been part of this program since its inception. As guests in Hawaii, students receive flower leis upon arrival and then have the opportunity to actually make their own lei from fresh flowers themselves. Requiring patience and a certain amount of dexterity, the students carefully craft individual leis while learning about some customs relating to wearing flowers in modern day Hawaii.

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Learning about Hawaiian musical instruments



Displaying hand-made leis together with LCC student volunteers

Another activity which is quite intensive is the hula song and dance lesson. Sometimes accompanied by ukulele, students learn by imitation the steps of at least one modern Hawaiian hula as well as the lyrics of the song. This past year, the students were taught a song in the Hawaiian language as well. Visibly embarrassed at the beginning, the students surprise the instructors and themselves with their progress in mastering an entire dance in an hour's time.

Visits to historical sites with guided tours provide the students with opportunities to learn more about what they have studied prior to departure. Actually seeing relics of the Hawaiian monarchy or the numerous immigrant groups living quarters used on sugar plantations helps to bring the information acquired during pre-departure class sessions to life. Opportunities to interact with the guides also serve as invaluable experiences where students learn the importance of soliciting more information to further their understanding.



From the top of Diamond Head

3. Observations of student behavior

For most of the students, participation in this program marks their initial overseas experience and understandably, they arrive at the destination full of both expectations as well as anxiety. As most students live at home with their families, the experience of dormitory life is especially daunting initially. Housed in different units within walking distance of each other, students room with a partner from Aichi University but they may find themselves to be the only Japanese-speaking students in a

particular dormitory wing. Dealing with the staff about non-functioning room keys or lost meal tickets, students first seek help of the chaperone to take care of all such problems. As most meals are taken at university cafeterias, students are also overwhelmed by the range of choices they must make. The first day often ends with the students feeling helpless, dissatisfied with the contents of the cafeteria meals and uncomfortable with coeducational housing arrangements where most facilities are used by both men and women.

As chaperone, the health and welfare of the students is one of the foremost concerns. However, if students can be led to realize that the problems they face are part of the learning experience, they begin to initiate problem-solving on their own. Instead of expecting the chaperone to take care of all details, they switch to asking advice on how to phrase questions or statements to be made of staff or neighbors. By the second day, students report progress made on issues relating to dormitory shower and laundry room usage, good-tasting meal selections and having had short conversations with dormitory residents.

In the classroom, marked changes in student behavior can be observed within a very short time. Although most students have had conversation classes in English with a native speaker teacher, they are initially overwhelmed by the language classes. The instructor does not understand Japanese and makes it clear that the more effort put into speaking will be rewarded outside the classroom. Advice on how to deal with Japanese-speaking clerks in the stores comes as a surprise and students realize that they can indeed gain control over a situation by insisting to use English when shopping. In contrast to classroom behavior often observed in Japan, the students listened to the instructor with much greater intensity. Homework assignments were completed before arriving in the classroom as well.

However, the most remarkable change occurs in their interactions with LCC student volunteers. Although the most sought after, interaction with peers in the host environment presents more pressure to succeed and therefore students display much apprehension in the initial meeting. Presented with the opportunity to converse with students of similar age, the students act almost painfully shy the first session. However, from the following day, they visibly change and can be observed to initiate conversations and participate more animatedly with the student volunteers. Information is sought about local specialty shops in addition to inquiring about student life at LCC. Being put in a position of 'authority', students could offer their opinions on the latest trends in Japanese youth culture.

Although their primary objective was to learn about and experience another culture, they realized that they were not only passive receptors. On the contrary, they found themselves in situations where they needed to be active in transmitting information about themselves and their culture. One example

to illustrate this point is students taking the initiative to perform a song in Japanese for the LCC teachers and staff at the farewell banquet. From such experiences, students return to Japan with a heightened sense of confidence in undertaking new endeavors. In the short span of a week, they become comfortable with dormitory life, using public transportation in a major urban area and communicating in the target language with a variety of people ranging from language teachers, university staff members, local students and people working in the service industries.

4. Extending opportunities for learning and growth

Over the past two years, efforts have been made to harness the energy of students once they return to Japan. Although their stay has been very short (one week), they return to Japan with renewed interest in acquiring English language skills and learning about both Hawaiian/American culture and Japanese culture as well, as documented in the questionnaires administered at the end of the program. By chance, University of Hawaii students have been studying Japanese in an intensive Japanese language program in Nagoya during early summer. The director of this program is also the instructor of the student volunteers at LCC, so communication channels have been very open, facilitating planning and enactment of activities involving students of both universities at the Toyohashi campus. Another way that students have been able to utilize their experiences is to make public their ideas by using the junior college website. In particular, this year marked the production of the first original homepage designed by two students about this particular program. In addition, students have had numerous opportunities to tell their stories to prospective students visiting the campus from local high schools or to their underclassmen.

The early summer activity held in 2004 to welcome students from the University of Hawaii to the Toyohashi campus was planned and carried out by the participants soon after their return to Japan from Hawaii. Having experienced the generosity of their hosts while in Hawaii, they were very keen to reciprocate in some manner. Through student-centered discussions, a range of activities was chosen and each student became a member of group responsible for the planning, preparation and execution. In three months time, meeting at lunchtime throughout spring semester, students planned out the details of the welcoming event which included a kamishibai performance, small group conversation time, food preparation, calligraphy, origami and tea ceremony lessons. Hosting a group of 13 students, the students went to great lengths to introduce aspects of their own culture and were visibly pleased at the positive response by the visitors. Conversing both in English and Japanese, students who had experienced firsthand the difficulties of communicating in another language were



U. of Hawaii and A.U. junior college students at Toyohashi campus event



Japanese calligraphy experience with U. of Hawaii students

very sensitive to the feelings of the visitors who had had a limited exposure to Japanese before coming to Japan. Exchanging email before and after this event, students have learned how to use the IT skills acquired to maintain communication with University of Hawaii students.



All participants in the Toyohashi campus event

Since many participants have studied how to make a homepage in computer classes at the junior college, a new project was instigated with two students as leaders. All participants were asked to contribute comments and photos to be edited and the editors spent a great deal time creating a visually pleasant as well as very informative record of their experience. Several links were added to provide more information for those who might be interested in participating in future programs or for those who wanted to learn more about Hawaii. During the process, the editors learned about the protocol involved using photographic images and permission was requested and obtained from fellow participants as well as LCC students and staff. Projects yet to be undertaken include editing of videotaped footage both in Hawaii and Toyohashi campus and creation of homepage describing the Toyohashi event which involved visiting University of Hawaii students.

Speaking in public to a sizable audience is an experience that most students do not have. However, after participation in this program, many students have had the opportunity to make focused reports on their experiences in Hawaii to underclassmen. Involved from the very beginning, they have discussed and decided the topics to be covered and the usage of media to enhance the presentation. Going through a dry run, they come to recognize the importance of good preparation for success of

such endeavors in addition to the power and confidence to be gained through cooperation.

5. In conclusion

From its inception, the author had not predicted the extent to which this program would expand to include post-program educational activities. The importance of having a pre-departure orientation was recognized from the beginning and has been an integral part of the program, with students attending six 90 minutes sessions designed to focus their attention on goal-setting and extra target language study. However, the events of the past two years has led the author to believe that such ripe opportunities for additional learning after returning to Japan through a variety of experiences involving brainstorming, discussion, planning, experimenting, seeking advice and interacting with university staff members cannot be passed up. Other areas that could be explored include the organizing of an informal group of students who wish to practice speaking English in addition to junior college classes and a Hawaii-focus group.

In recognition of the support given to the program by the department and staff, the author wishes to express her appreciation and also to extend her thanks to the students whose enthusiasm is what fuels all new endeavors.

References

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