

# The Bukkyo University and University of Hawai'i College of Education Partnership<sup>1</sup>

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For the past ten years, the College of Education at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM-COE) and Bukkyo University in Kyoto, Japan have enjoyed a special relationship designed to promote cooperation and academic exchanges between the two institutions. The agreement of cooperation was signed on June 5, 2000 by President Shinko Nakai of Bukkyo and Dean Randy Hitz of the UHM-COE. Like most formal agreements of this sort, work had begun a bit earlier to shape an agreement. In effect, the partnership had its origins in a number of informal meetings by faculty from the two institutions during meetings of the Japan-US Teacher Education Consortium (JUSTEC); in particular, the 1998 meeting held at Bukkyo and the 1999 meeting in Honolulu. Professors Haruo Nishinosono and Keijiro Tanaka of Bukkyo University and Professor Aiko Oda of UHM-COE were the people who were most instrumental in making the arrangements and negotiating the details of the first “formal agreement of cooperation,” as it is referred to.

The aim of this agreement was to promote student and faculty exchanges, conduct joint research and publications activities, encourage participation in seminars and academic meetings, facilitate the exchange of academic materials, and arrange special short-term academic programs including practical training and field work. The first agreement was set up for a period of five years. The second agreement, identical to the first, was signed on March 31, 2005, this time by Chancellor Peter Englert and Dean Randy Hitz for UHM and by President Ryuzen Fukuhara and Dean Shoko Nishioka on behalf of Bukkyo University.

The UHM-Bukkyo agreement has been especially effective in living up to its aim of promoting academic exchanges. Each year, during the spring semester, around fifty students and faculty arrive from Bukkyo to visit the UHM campus. While there, arrangements are made for them to visit local elementary schools. These visits have been made possible by the school/university partnership between several local schools and UH. As a result, Bukkyo faculty and their students have been able to visit a number

of schools in several districts—for example, Ala Wai ES, the UH Lab School, Holomua ES, Waikīkī ES, Mānoa ES, Nānāikapono ES, and Ke Kula Kaiapuni 'o Ānuenue (Ānuenue Immersion School). During these week-long visits the Japanese student teachers, under the supervision of their faculty, conduct mini-lessons in English at different elementary school grade levels. Most of these students are in the Bukkyo University's elementary education program, but visiting groups often include a small number of students in the clinical psychology program who are preparing to become school counselors. To accommodate these students, school visits have been arranged so that they can meet with school counselors to learn about the issues facing school counseling programs in the US. In addition, a small number of students are enrolled in Bukkyo's Life-Long Learning program and special visits have been arranged for these groups to Kapiolani Community College and various Honolulu senior centers.

The visits provide an excellent opportunity for students to practice their English and widen their horizons regarding teaching in the US, especially given the much greater diversity of cultures represented in Hawai'i's classrooms than in Japan's. But the benefits go two ways as they also offered the student teachers a chance to teach American students about Japanese culture. For example, during the 2010 visit to Ala Wai Elementary School the Bukkyo student teachers, under the supervision of Bukkyo faculty Sunao Goto and Yukiyo Horike, made a presentation to the entire fifth grade on Japanese martial arts. The Ala Wai students were invited to hone their skills as samurai warriors by using paper swords to cut through sheets of paper and then, dressed as ninja warriors they threw paper stars at a target. Besides being great fun, the Ala Wai students learned valuable lessons about Japanese values.

Over the ten years of the partnership, these visits have evolved into well-organized study tours in which the Bukkyo students make elaborate preparations for their trips by carefully planning their mini-lessons, which they

conduct in English. Dr. Sunao Goto, Associate Professor of Education at Bukkyo University emphasizes the importance of these study trips in the context of the recent guidelines of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (MEXT) to require public elementary schools in Japan to implement English education activities as part of their international education programs. The study tours provide Bukkyo University students with a unique opportunity to practice what they would be required to teach as elementary school teachers. They gain experience in using English in the classroom, cultivate a deeper understanding of different cultures, and learn to develop their communicative competence in English in realistic educational settings.

Another benefit of these visits is that the Bukkyo faculty have been able to establish a number of direct relationships with schools in Hawai'i. In 2006, Professor Goto coordinated a special project between Rakushi Elementary School in Kyoto and and Holomua Elementary School. Over a period of six days from March 26 to March 30, six student teachers, four university faculty, and a number of elementary school teachers organized and presented a Festival of Japan to the Hawai'i elementary school students. Students taught mini-lessons and conducted a festival that involved instruction in so-ran bushi (an ancient Japanese sea shanty), dances, paper airplane construction, and calligraphy.

Dr. Goto reports that these study tours have been of considerable value in familiarizing student teachers with English and in providing opportunities to hone their English communication and instructional skills. In addition, the experience of taking an active part in an elementary school classroom offers valuable exposure to a more diverse student population than is typical in Japan.

For UHM-COE faculty the opportunities that have been made available by the partnership to visit Kyoto and interact with Bukkyo faculty has been of equally high value. In the past ten years more than twenty-five COE faculty have visited Bukkyo, usually in connection with the annual International Education Conference. Bukkyo University is an incomparably rich setting for a conference. It is close to some of the most important Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines in Japan. Daitoku-ji is close by the campus, as is the celebrated Golden Temple, Kinkaku-ji. The world famous rock garden of Ryoan-ji is only a short bus ride away. For many COE faculty, these visits have provided an incomparable introduction to Japanese culture and history.

Bukkyo University dates back to the Meiji Restoration of 1868. It originated as a Buddhist teaching facility at Chion-In Temple. Chion-In was founded in memory of Saint Honen (1133-1212 C.E.) who spread the Jodo ("Pure Land") sect of Japanese Buddhism during the Kamakura Era. To this day, Bukkyo University remains dedicated to the principles of Saint Honen and requires that its presidents be priests of Jodo-shin Buddhism.

It is no exaggeration to say that these annual visits have offered UHM-COE faculty with wonderfully valuable opportunities to gain insights into Japanese culture and to learn about the kinds of problems that our Japanese colleagues in faculties of education currently face in their work.

The first International Conference on education was held at Bukkyo University in April, 2001 on the topic of field-based teacher education, with Hunter McEwan and Joe Zilliox as presenters from UH. Later conferences have covered a number of significant themes of common interest including such topics as language education; teaching in challenging and changing times; multicultural education, diversity and inclusion; and teacher preparation. Bukkyo has played host to over twenty-five UHM-COE faculty over these years, all of whom have felt enriched by the hospitality and generosity of their Japanese hosts.

In 2006, a new exchange format was arranged to provide opportunities for scholarly exchange on a slightly longer basis. Professor Seiji Hara was the first scholar to make the trip from Kyoto to Honolulu, followed the next year by Hunter McEwan who spent three invaluable weeks at Bukkyo in June 2007 where he met with faculty, participated in classes, and visited schools. (This special issue of *Educational Perspectives* on the theme of teaching English in Japan is one of the outcomes of that visit). Later visitors of the scholar exchange program have included Hiroko Higashiyama in 2008 and Tony Toralba in 2009. This year, 2010, Sunao Goto is a visiting professor in the Department of Educational Foundations at UHM-COE.

The term of the second agreement is now complete and discussions are underway for a third five-year agreement to continue the Bukkyo-UH tradition of cooperation and partnership.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> This article was composed with input from Aiko Oda, David Ericson, and Christine Sorensen from the University of Hawai'i and JoAnn Soong of Ala Wai School.