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Curricular goals in participating in the Japan-U.S. Teacher Exchange Program for ESD

My goals in participating in the Japan-U.S. Teacher Exchange Program for ESD were to deepen my own instruction of ESD, broaden the interest in ESD across my school and district, and to make and maintain fruitful relationships with colleagues from across America and Japan.

Specifically, I wanted to imbed the principles of ESD in all of my lessons and units of instruction in order to help students realize that all of what we do in life affects others and thus we should always be concerned with sustainability whether we are studying literature or walking on the beach.

Also, I wanted to expand awareness and understanding of ESD to other teachers at my school and in my district. If my whole school can begin to understand and teach the concepts of ESD, the impact of that teaching will be stronger and longer lasting. Working on my own isolates my students and me and is not in itself sustainable. The concepts of ESD should be applied to the school community at large and not kept behind classroom doors.

Finally, I wanted to connect with other professionals from across America and Japan to help strengthen my instruction. I have much to learn about novel ways to incorporate the concepts of ESD into my teaching and my life, so I look towards others in hopes of borrowing from their expertise.

Attainment of those goals and Implementation of new or revised curricula

In terms of meeting the goals that I set for myself when I began this process a few years ago, and reaffirmed before our recent trip to Japan, I have made great progress. My experiences in meeting with the other participants last spring and in Japan this past summer have greatly impacted my own teaching, helping me meet all my goals.

First, I have taken some of the small concepts that I began with a few years ago and have broadened them so that they are present in my instruction all year long. Now, with every major unit of study in my English classes, students identify connections to other content areas and to their own lives. These connections help the students take the next step, which is to make some actual impact in their community. Moving beyond simply identifying connections is helping the students interact with and tend to their community, helping the whole island to be more sustainable. These connections are also helping the teachers at my school become more connected with each other as they notice their students making these cross-curricular connections.

My work with the Japan-U.S. Teacher Exchange Program for ESD has also helped me to meet my second goal of increasing the understanding and acceptance of ESD across my school and district. I am now working with the School Community Council, Family Focus, and the Data Teams Steering Committee at our school to implement some school-wide projects to encourage sustainability. We are currently in the process of securing funding for a water delivery system for our students and faculty to use so that our school community does not have to rely on plastic bottles, as they do now. The system will provide cool, filtered water at various stations around campus and each student will have a stainless steel bottle for refilling. Hopefully this small step will have a

ripple affect, causing students to waste less and to stop relying on sugary sports drinks and sodas. This water project is also connecting our school with other schools on the island and across the state, as we all grapple with issues of economics and refuse.

My final goal was to begin and maintain relationships with other teachers from across the U.S. and Japan in order to begin projects that connect my school community to other school communities across the country and ocean. Again, my time working with this exchange program has been fruitful. I have made many friendships that impact my teaching in small ways almost daily, but I have also begun a few larger projects with colleagues both in America and in Japan.

Connecting my school community to others was foremost in my mind when I returned from Japan and my first step was to reach across the street to the private school here on Kauai. Making connections across the planet is important, but if my students do not see that they are connected to the students at the school down the street, then we have a problem. Understanding that, my first step was to call a former teacher at the private school to see if we could start some ESD-related projects. It was this phone call that led to the water project described earlier. This phone call also began another project connecting the students from all the schools on the island, wherein students practice scenes, music, and other performances to share with each other at an art festival to be held late this winter. This art festival is envisioned to become a permanent fixture of the school year and eventually build to include an off island performance.

Moving to connections beyond my island, I am in the early stages of broadening an important writing assignment from my class to include students in Vermont and Japan, wherein all students will explore their own life-defining values and then share them with peers from across the country and Japan. Students create polished essays that creatively and effectively discuss their values. They also learn to create radio essays that tend to have a stronger impact on others. Sharing these values, via essays and radio shows, will help the students see their own lives in a different light and will also deepen their understanding of the fact that we live in a global village and are not isolated from each other as we tend to imagine.

My Nature Club is also in the midst of a project that was suggested to me by one of my Japanese colleagues. He is a teacher who has his science students clean a nearby beach and then identify where the garbage came from, in an attempt to understand how far distant locales are directly connected to us. He noticed that my Nature Club students do beach clean ups and he suggested that they do a similar survey of the garbage so that my students and his students can exchange information. Hopefully this process will result in a videoconference between our schools, but we are still doing the business of cleaning beaches. This project is especially interesting in the wake of the earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan last spring as the flotsam and jetsam created by that disaster is currently on its way to Hawaii. This will be a great opportunity for our school and island communities to discuss how our lifestyles can impact others across the sea.

How I plan to use this experience from here on

As can be inferred, my overall goal is to always change and improve my teaching practices. I want students to see the value of the skills I teach. I want them to notice that thinking critically and noticing our impact on our surroundings is of paramount

importance. I do not want them to think of my class as simply an English class, but I want them to see my class as a place to learn how to be a responsible member of our Earth's community. To that end, my experiences with the Japan-U.S. Teacher Exchange Program for ESD will continue to help me examine and reexamine my teaching practices by keeping me in touch with the larger teaching community. I hope to continue my work with the exchange program in any way possible.