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# The Students' Cumulative History of the MET Program

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In this article the students offer their unique perspectives on the MET program. Each section is written by two students representing each of the first three cohorts. Cohort I students graduated in 1993, Cohort II in 1994 and Cohort III in 1995.

**Cohort One: August 1991 to May 1993 by Susan Kawamoto, Derek Minakami and Twelve Other Respondents.**

*The ten year reunion should be fun*

The first cohort consisted of twenty-five students. Ten were assigned to work at Kailua High School and the others at Ala Wai, Aliamanu and Kaewai Elementary schools. One student left during the orientation week and another left after the first year of the program to move to Jakarta. Three students were unable to complete their studies by the end of the second year and two graduated at a later time. Nine students graduated in May 1993 and eleven graduated in the summer session.

Of the twenty-two graduates of Cohort I, sixteen are now teaching in public schools in Hawai'i; one teaches in Long Beach, California; one returned to Japan after teaching for a year on Moloka'i; one is a museum curator; one is an assistant women's volleyball coach with the University of Arkansas and another is believed to be teaching somewhere on the mainland.

*because we know how to collaborate*

As this article serves as a history of the MET program, we endeavored to write it in the true spirit of the MET as a collaborative piece.

First, we did our research and sent out a survey to Cohort I alumni asking them to answer some questions regarding their MET experience. We weren't looking just for favorable comments; we invited critical reflection, too. Our respondents addressed the questions and their responses certainly agree that collaboration was one of the defining elements of the MET program. Therefore, in keeping with this principle,

we decided to write this article as a collaborative one, drawing on as many perspectives as possible.

*and our cohort were the pioneers*

As the first group to undergo the MET experience, we see ourselves as pioneers who first helped to get things going and who helped give shape and direction to the program. Prior to us, the program was a set of principles and goals authored by the University of Hawai'i College of Education and Department of Education faculty. During our two years in the program, the MET became a reality. One student wrote: "I feel a sense of pride whenever I meet a fellow MET teacher; I know that I've contributed to their learning."

When we began as students in the program, we didn't believe that the ideal of student participation was real. However, from the first day, the faculty informed us that we were to be partners in the program— sharing in the decision making process. Initially, we found this difficult. After all, the faculty were still in full charge of grading. Nevertheless, we quickly learned to give our input. Things appeared very chaotic as we learned to "take charge of our own learning" and as we grew more comfortable with functioning in this new way. We persevered through the conflict and confusion and gradually, began to contribute our share to the evolution of the program. We have a sense now that the program reflects our pioneering contributions.

Most of us applied to the MET because it advertised itself as student-centered, collaborative and experiential. Undoubtedly, these were the cornerstone values of the program. They were, after all, the values shared by the MET students who were seeking a more field-based program and the faculty, who wished to implement a model of teacher training and classroom teaching that reflected the new educational paradigm.

*at times we wondered why we did it*

As a result of the faculty's efforts to empower us, we gained more control over the focus of our studies. Faculty encouraged us to take more responsibility for determining

what we learned about teaching and becoming educators. Assigned areas of inquiry were very wide and spurred us to define a variety of smaller topics. Together, we covered a wide range of subjects and learned to be both flexible in our thinking and show a high tolerance for diverse points of view.

The emphasis on student participation also spawned a value for personal discipline that was critical in determining our own success in the program and as professionals. However, the lack of clear instructions and expectations, and variable student commitment yielded considerable confusion and an uneven quality in our products, including the quality of the student experience and level of student guidance.

Though our individual philosophies differed and though our experiences were not always positive, we ultimately benefited from the level of faculty support, program articulation and the experience of working together as a cohort. The faculty encouraged us to network between elementary and secondary schools, as well as across areas of specialization. And though, at times, our efforts were directed to socializing, thus inhibiting academic discussion, we usually had the self-discipline to be productive. We found great value in one another's advice and in sharing school experiences.

*but we did it*

As members of a program that espoused values such as collaborative learning, inquiry and reflection, we strove to imbed these principles in our own teaching. We upheld these standards in our own practice, believing in the student-centered ideal and seeking to integrate innovative methods into what we did in the classroom. For several reasons, however, students have sometimes found it difficult to teach in this way; sometimes for personal reasons and sometimes because of the context in which they found themselves teaching after they left the program.

Probably the most important aspect of the MET program was our mode of learning became the biggest influence on the way we developed our own philosophies of teaching and in the ways that we have subsequently tried to teach. The underlying concept was that of "practice what you preach," and "walk the talk." As one respondent wrote, we were part of a program that was "billed as cutting edge, student driven, inquiry based." There was an effort among the faculty to put these principles into practice. Nevertheless, at times, we felt that these were just words. One student commented that "it was not student-based or inquiry-driven [at all]."

*and we gave it our all*

The MET faculty did strive to create a more student-

centered, democratic ideal. On the first day of orientation, we elected two student representatives to sit on the MET Executive Council and we were assured that they would have the same voice on governance issues as any of the faculty. We were encouraged to make decisions about our own learning.

The faculty provided us with broad areas to investigate such as "The Learner and Learning" but the specific formulation of the topic was a matter of negotiation among the teams of student inquirers. One faculty member exhorted us to "go out there and inquire." The flexibility inherent in this approach resulted in students following a number of different paths and approaching the subject from a variety of perspectives. For example, one group decided to investigate experiential learning. We learned more about this topic during their hands-on seminar presentation in which we were required to reconstruct a human skeleton from construction-paper bones. Another group invited guest speaker Tom Jackson, associate specialist, Department of Philosophy who spoke on the subject of philosophy for children. Yet another inquiry project focused on Pidgin and the use of Creole in the schools. We were able to learn from each other in these full-cohort seminars. College faculty provided articles to enrich our reading and encouraged students to share what they were learning.

In the spirit of student-centered learning, the ideal of shared decision-making was stressed. It was ingrained in us that "we were responsible for our own learning." But many survey respondents asked if there was a better way to regulate the group work and actions of individual MET students. In other words, was there a way to get them all to contribute equally. There was a feeling that some students did not take this responsibility as seriously as others did, nor did they work as hard.

*in our effort to team*

As a cohort, we were a fairly cohesive group. The elementary and secondary students began the "bonding" process on the first day of orientation. This sense of unity gave us a strong voice and we were, possibly, hard to manage. From the first we were fixated, as most students are, on getting good grades. However, there was some confusion about this matter. As a new program that focused on student involvement and collaboration, it was, perhaps, difficult to find clear criteria on which to grade. Papers, for example, were often co-authored and student contributions, unequal. The faculty seemed divided on how to resolve the issue and some confusion resulted.

In the second semester, student attendance at seminars fell off. This may have been due to several factors including the heavy load of teaching that we were required to do at school but the understanding that we were not being held accountable, grade-wise, was also a contributing factor.

In the third semester, the faculty decided to "rein us in." This had the desired shock-effect. One student, still upset at this wrote in the survey: "This change of philosophy is bogus and underhanded. I should have been told before the grading period that my lack of attendance would get me a 'B'." It was, for some of us, a lesson in classroom management.

*despite the hindrances*

Another student wrote, "Although we would like grades to be irrelevant and for the focus to be on the process of learning, the power struggle will remain as long as teachers are grade givers." From our experiences in the MET, even negative ones, we learned that grades are not synonymous with learning and that there are other ways to provide evaluation and feedback. We learned the importance of reflection through open discussions and the use of logs. We learned, in effect, from the experience that teachers need to develop a sense of self-evaluation in students.

*and distractions.*

Practically every respondent to the survey claimed that an invaluable part of the MET program is the student support network. This network arose, naturally, from the cohort structure of the program and the mixing of elementary and secondary students in the inquiry groups and seminars. The network flourished, especially, in informal settings. One MET student responded, "I loved being able to meet regularly with my MET peers. They helped me with planning. They listened to my woes and offered me advice—oftentimes excellent. Funny though, that my most productive moments with my peers were informal and unstructured. The reliance on peer support and on working together in teams built up our experience in working in collaborative groups and formal teams in the school setting in the final year of the program. Working with others gave me the opportunity to pool the strengths from classmates, professors, guest speakers, [DOE] teachers and to apply it to my own style."

Faculty guidance and support were valuable in facilitating teaming. It enabled new, experimental projects to be implemented in the classroom. For example, a new approach to the practicum was tried out in two classrooms—one at the high school and the other at Kaewai Elementary School. This teaming approach involved a period of summer planning and the implementation of new curriculum in the fall semester. The success of the experiment led to it being more fully implemented with Cohort II. Indeed, teamwork became so ingrained in the practice of one of the students in the practicum experiment that he wrote: "I had a hard time adjusting to life in the real DOE world. I was so used to working with three other minds and getting support

from everyone." Collaboration is something the MET student grows up with, professionally. Although we have less now, we actively pursue opportunities to work together with other teachers.

**The Story of Cohort Two** by Lori Tamasaki and Wesley Yuu

What happens when you put twenty people pursuing a post-graduate degree together for two years in a teacher training program? Imagine that the twenty individuals have diverse educational and social backgrounds: three are married with children, six are fresh out of baccalaureate programs, and fourteen are leaving their old careers. And what has happened to these graduates of the Master of Education in Teaching program?

Our story begins in August of 1992. We were 20 strangers brought together for an orientation into the Master's of Education in Teaching (MET) Program. We were placed into inquiry groups of four individuals and were given our first task: "What is inquiry?" Not only did this assignment launch us on a whole new way of thinking, it started the bond of camaraderie that progressed throughout the program. Thus, during the three-day immersion into the program, we were also introduced to the ideas of collaboration and reflection.

From the beginning, we were assigned to different elementary and secondary schools where we spent three semesters learning first-hand about the processes of teaching and learning.

In the first semester, we observed the functions and community of the school which was captured in a written portrait. Our observations also became an integral part of our weekly seminar discussions which focused on the theories behind teaching and learning.

We continued observing teachers in the classroom in the second semester, with the added responsibility of developing and implementing lesson and unit plans. Within our school groups, we reflected on our school portrait and looked into school renewal. In our inquiry and seminar groups, we continued to examine educational theories. Mainly, we focused on the educational philosophy of John Dewey. Although many of us grumbled about having to labor through three of Dewey's books, we must admit that we came away from that semester with different philosophies of learning and teaching than when we started.

In the third semester, we began student-teaching. With most of us, collaboration with a cooperating teacher occurred during the summer to aid in planning the curriculum for the upcoming school year. Fortunately, the College of Education offered course credits for the time spent planning. Those who attended the two-week long sessions say that they would strongly recommend that all MET students and their cooperating teachers take the course in the summer prior to the third semester. Some MET students, however, simply met their cooperating teachers days or weeks before school

started to go over the first couple weeks of school. Some were given the freedom to plan the curriculum on their own, provided they stay within the guidelines of the course. Nevertheless, this was the semester where we put our educational philosophies to the test. When we met for our weekly seminars, we often had heated discussions on how we should cope with teaching in our current school system while looking for ways to implement Twenty-First Century ideas.

Our fourth and final semester proved to be an adventure. Not only were we completely on our own in internships at different schools around the island but also we had the extra burden of having to complete our Plan B papers, as well as worry about future employment prospects. Although we had teacher mentors and the university facilitators to turn to, we functioned as regular paid employees of the Department of Education, responsible for our own classrooms and students.

Some MET students were fortunate to do their internship in the same classroom in which they student-taught, due, in one case, to the cooperating teacher going on sabbatical and due, in four more, to their partners becoming MET mentor teachers. For the rest of us, teaching began again in a new classroom in the middle of the school year. We had to meet the challenge of taking over where the former teacher left off. This semester would be the MET students' first time on their own in a classroom, and in addition, they had the extra difficulty of helping students to adjust to a new teacher. Unfortunately, one student decided to drop out of the MET program in the middle of this semester. The rest of us stayed in the course and we were ecstatic as the end of the school year approached. For those who had finished the Plan B paper, graduation brought closure to two years in a graduate program. For the rest, graduation would be just a summer away.

So far, we have given an academic overview of our two years in the MET program. But how have those two years changed our lives? We thought that we could express what we gained from the program by answering the question, "What will we always remember from our MET experience?" We came up with two general answers: learning how to teach and the friendships that were built.

#### *Learning How to Teach*

Looking back at the two years in the MET program, we discovered that the secret to learning how to teach lies in understanding how students learn. We gained this knowledge by observing students and teachers in the classroom, then forming our own ideas on what strategies worked and did not work. Some ideas and issues that we discussed in our school groups, inquiry groups and the full cohort group included child-centered learning, focusing on the whole child, age-appropriate curriculum, anti-biased curriculum,

assessment tools, self-evaluation and critical thinking. Through collaboration with our peers and professional colleagues, we examined how these issues would shape our own teaching philosophies.

In addition to learning by observing, we also learned another philosophy of the MET program—you learn by experience. Being in the classroom provided an environment where we could observe learning first-hand and experiment with a variety of teaching strategies. At times, we would team up with our cooperating teachers to try out new strategies. At other times, our cooperating teacher would give us the opportunity to experiment by ourselves. Nevertheless, we could always reflect on what happened and determine what worked or didn't work and why. We definitely had our share of successes and failures but every experience was part of becoming a better teacher.

Although the program was driven by practical, classroom experience, it was supplemented with theory through seminars and inquiry groups. In the first three semesters of the program, we examined many theories on teaching and learning. But in the fourth semester, while we were doing our internships, we were finally able to make connections between theory and practice. MET students reported in the seminars how they were able to test educational theories such as whole language, cooperative learning and alternative assessment in their classrooms.

As students, we saw the significance of hands-on learning and as teachers, we are including these ideas in our own practice. By the end of the program, we had discovered that learning how to teach goes beyond the MET program. As we progress in our careers, we find that learning is a life-long process. And as we are learning to teach, we are learning about life.

#### *Friendship*

How can twenty people work together in a program and NOT become friends? There were so many opportunities that allowed friendships to grow.

From the beginning, several of us established carpools especially since we were traveling to the same schools. Time together in the car on long rides was usually spent talking about the school day or chatting about various topics.

Friendships were also built within school groups and inquiry groups that met together weekly. How can we forget all the times we would drive off to get a bite to eat before or even during meetings? Some inquiry groups would often grumble about other inquiry groups that seemed always to be taking food breaks from meetings.

Our cohort was fortunate to have individuals like Lori Tamasaki to plan social events such as picnics and Christmas parties. Our first picnic at Magic Island brought together almost the entire cohort of students as well as university facilitators. The day was filled with games, food and lots of

conversation. It was a chance to meet each other's families and significant others.

At the end of our first semester, several of us planned to get together at Ryan's Park Place Restaurant for an end-of-the-semester celebration. Who would have guessed that this would lead to many more social gatherings. We would always find some excuse to meet at Ryan's. It was great stress relief!

Another relaxing activity was camping at a beach house. We did this during both summers of the program. We thought of our camps as a last chance to rejuvenate ourselves before the next school year began. Although not everyone attended, those who did will never forget the good times we shared.

It was a good thing that many of us shared a bond with each other. There were many times when each of us needed to share a joyful moment or cry on another's shoulders. There was always someone there for support and encouragement. For those of us that graduated in May, it was a joy to be able to sit together and enjoy the moment when our degrees were conferred.

More than a year has passed since we graduated from the MET program. Some graduates moved to the mainland or outer islands. But those of us who remain on Oahu still keep in touch with one another. We still have get-togethers and occasionally, we go out on the town together. Recently, several of us attended a MET planning session at the Honolulu Country Club. One of the goals we set for ourselves was to establish a MET Alumni Association. We look forward to building these new associations but it will be a truly special event when our entire cohort gets together in five or ten years for a reunion.

Initially, we were twenty individuals with one common goal—to obtain a Master's Degree in teaching. Looking back, we gained much more than that. We acquired two years of hands-on experience in the classroom, we became independent thinkers and life-long learners and most importantly, we became life-long friends and colleagues.

#### **Trials and Tribulations of Cohort III by Kathy Murdoch & Puanani Higa**

In the fall of 1993, twenty ambitious women and men (only 3 men) were boldly about to enter a two-year educational journey into the unknown MET zone where ideas of self-directed inquiry, reflection and collaboration abounded. During orientation week, we listened to administrators and program faculty talk about the emerging wave of educational reform and that as "revolutionaries" of the College of Education we would be directly involved in changing the present system. For most of us, it was difficult enough to maneuver around the University maze of buildings, few of us thought of ourselves as "revolutionaries." We did, however, share one common goal—we knew that we

wanted more than the traditional teacher preparation program had to offer.

#### *Diversity Among the Ranks*

We were called Cohort III for no other reason except that we followed Cohorts I and II. Over time, we paved our own roads and broke through many difficult barricades. Cohort III was very diverse. We spanned the U.S. with participants from New York to Maui. Five came from the continental U.S., two from Maui and the remaining thirteen from Oahu.

Our Cohort facilitators, Hunter McEwan and Allen Awaysa were polar opposites at times. The University professor and the veteran teacher—one stressed philosophy and theory while the other promoted practical classroom application. It was the balance of the two minds that created such a unique opportunity for us. We were constantly faced with opposing viewpoints of theory and practice. The facilitators kept each other in check and allowed us a healthy dose of each viewpoint.

Our educational backgrounds were as diverse as the areas from which we came. Participants attending private schools outnumbered those from public schools by a 2:1 margin. Our undergraduate degrees ranged from mathematics to philosophy to graphic arts. Many had been out of the academic realm for some time before deciding to enter the MET program, while a few were fresh from the undergraduate world. Once in the MET, our educational backgrounds faded as we formed our school groups. Eight participants were introduced to Salt Lake Elementary School as their MET site, four ventured over to Dole Intermediate, while the remaining eight participants cruised over the Ko'olau to Kailua High School.

During orientation week, we were exposed to the MET "buzz word"—inquiry. "What does inquiry mean?" we asked our teachers. To add to our confusion, their response was, "What do you think it means?" This dialogue led to our first group paper entitled *The Inquiry into Inquiry*. Each group had to define what the term "inquiry" meant. We weren't given any guidelines or suggestions for resources. It was the group's responsibility to develop their understanding of the nature of inquiry and present their findings to the full cohort by the end of the week.

Here we were on the first day of graduate school being told to do research on something that we knew little or nothing about and writing a paper together with a group of people we had just met. Needless to say, working in groups did not go smoothly. Individual personalities and writing styles began to conflict and added frustration to an already difficult situation.

The inquiry presentations were very different. Some groups simply reported their findings in the traditional manner while other groups created skits that illustrated the group's own inquiry process. Little did we know that we

were already learning from each other.

During the semester, time was set aside twice a week to work on our group inquiries. We remained in the same inquiry groups for the first semester that we were in during orientation and changed groups later in the year. Individual and self-selected inquiries made up the second semester. Over time, our inquiry processes began to take shape. We developed coping mechanisms to deal with the problems which led to fewer conflicts and more cohesive working relationships. However, many of us felt that due to lack of time and schedule problems, some inquiry papers took the form of cooperative rather than collaborative efforts. At times, groups simply divided up the topic among the members and came together at the end to type the final paper. We realized it was not the purpose of the program, but it was unavoidable at times (depending on your group).

#### *Going Back to "School"*

Immersion was our first taste of what the present day school system was like. For the first few days of September, we observed a variety of classroom environments within our own schools and reflected in journals on what we observed. For most of us, it had been many years since we were in the students' seats. The whole idea of "school" seemed so different from what we experienced. Values, parental support, strategies, discipline, motivation and attitudes were not the same as we remembered. Many of us shadowed students through their "typical" school day. Some of us even shadowed school security, cafeteria workers and the principal. It was all part of seeing the "entire" school.

Looking back, many of our observations seemed so naive and superficial. We couldn't understand much of what was going on at the time. Fortunately as time progressed, we learned how to interpret what we observed less critically and more reflectively. Soon, we began to feel more comfortable in the classrooms and some of us started teaching mini-lessons. In no time at all, we were teaching and learning that things don't always work out as planned.

#### *The Portrait*

Our first major project in the MET was the "portrait." In theory, the portrait represented a view of the school site from the point of view of the MET participants. The task seemed relatively clear cut, right? Wrong! In reality, the portrait taught our Cohort a real lesson about the "politics" of working in a school.

Each school site was responsible for structuring exactly what the portrait would look like as well as the topic of the portrait. Topics ranged from multi-age classes to the middle school concept and heterogeneous versus homogeneous groupings to the impact of extra-curricular activities on school.

Problems varied from school to school, but for the most part, we all agreed on the following:

- We were new at the school and felt uncomfortable as outsiders about interpreting what we "saw." What did we really know?
- By focusing on one aspect of the school, we were leaving out other parts of the school.
- We tried to stay away from seeming judgmental or making assumptions.
- We tried to reflect adequately the varied opinions of those in the school.
- Politics hindered our presentation of some findings. We felt as if we were producing an infomercial of the school.
- We felt as if we were "walking on eggshells," not wanting to offend anyone.
- Collaboration within the portrait group was especially demanding.

Collaboration is difficult for any new group of people working together. It was no different on the portrait projects. It was hard to accommodate the various learning styles and schedules of the participants. Working so closely together, personal conflicts started to develop. Luckily, this did not pose any major problems. Most participants learned to cope with what each person could add to the group. At times, we felt the collaborative effort was lost to the cooperative reality.

Overall, we all realized that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages of doing the portrait project. We learned about the intricacies of school politics and the problems of working together for the sake of collaboration. We learned how to accept what others had to offer as well as to adapt our ideas for the benefit of the whole group. One suggestion that we can offer for future cohorts is to work on the portrait during the second semester. This arrangement might give participants longer to experience the school and gain confidence in using educational concepts.

#### *Self-assessment*

Over the course of the program, we learned the importance of reflecting on our personal and professional growth within the program. We assessed ourselves through journal writings, conferences with facilitators and teachers, and, at least twice a semester, during the formal midterm and end-of-semester evaluations. Assessments allowed us to develop our own emerging teaching philosophies and will, we hope, give us the tools to further reflection and practice throughout our teaching careers.

In terms of positive contributions, the Kailua participants developed a detailed list of competencies in collaboration

with the MET students, DOE faculty and the UH facilitator. These competencies were constantly revisited and updated to meet the needs of all parties.

#### *Teaching Practice: Solo Versus Pairs*

The teaching situations in the third semester varied from school to school and was determined by each school site. The elementary participants remained in pairs throughout the first three semesters, while the secondary participants chose to teach both solo and in pair groups as well as in out-of-content areas. Exposure to each situation was vital to forming our teaching philosophies and strategies. Pairing allowed for feedback and reflection as well as another viewpoint for curriculum development and classroom management issues. Emotional support was also an added benefit to working in pairs. "Teaching in pairs wasn't as overwhelming as if I had the whole class to myself from the start," one participant added. There are, however, disadvantages to working in pairs. Personalities and curriculum conflicts can occur when mutual consensus is not reached. Those who solo-taught felt that it was closest to the real classroom situation. They had to develop quickly their strategies and techniques to adapt to their own situations.

#### *The End is Near...*

The journey that began two short years ago quickly came to an end. We dropped from twenty to eighteen MET students, by the fourth semester. We found ourselves separated among different schools on Oahu. Some of us were able to stay at our school sites while others had to apply to other schools and participate in interviews with principals. No matter what the situation, each of us has had to overcome new barriers and challenges during this final semester. It can get lonely at times being the new kid on the block. We must all start from scratch again, some of us with a new set of students. Having our own students, our own classrooms (except for the two floaters), our own bulletin boards, and new faculty colleagues was a lot to adapt to. This is what teaching really is — lesson planning, endless mounds of papers to correct, thematic units, whole language, parent conferences, lost weekends and big classes. Will teaching ever get any easier?

For most of us the Plan B papers were signed and turned in early enough to graduate in May. We'll all miss the special camaraderie and support that this unique group of people called Cohort III has added to our lives.

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Derek Minakami teaches physics at Kailua High School. He is an alumnus of Cohort I and currently serves as an MET mentor with Cohort V students.

Lori Tamasaki is Title One and Literacy Coordinator at Benjamin Parker Elementary School in the Hawai'i State Department of Education Windward district. She is a graduate of Cohort II.

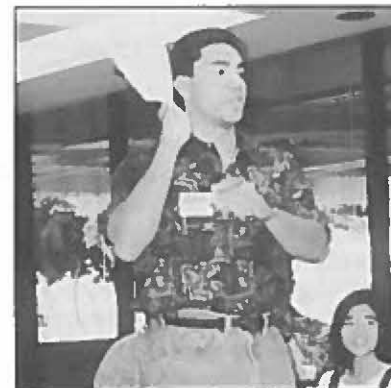
Wesley Yuu teaches mathematics at Dole Intermediate School in Honolulu. He is a graduate of Cohort II.

Kathy Murdoch teaches at Lanikai Elementary School in Kailua on the island of Oahu. She is a graduate of Cohort III.

Puanani Higa teaches English at Waimanalo Intermediate School. She is a graduate of Cohort III.



*Joyce Felipe of Cohort V presenting at the Hera Conference*



*Lloyd Sing of Cohort IV conducting orientation for Cohort V*