A study on better in-service training program for high school English teachers: Through a survey on teaching problems & training program content requests

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Author(s)

YONAHA, Keiko

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A study on better in-service training program for high school English teachers
-Through a survey on teaching problems & training program content requests-

YONASHA Keiko (MEIO University)

With the introduction of the "teachers' certificate renewal system", beginning in 2009, the role of universities as institutions to provide training programs for current teachers to maintain their teaching skills has been increased. It is the author's view that without a study on teachers' problems in teaching and requests for the content of training programs, good training programs which satisfy teachers as trainees cannot be provided. The purpose of this paper is to propose better training programs for English teachers by studying English teachers' problems in teaching and their requests for the content of training programs.

First, by reviewing literature and her own twenty years' experience as a high school English teacher, the author ascertained the top four problems faced in teaching English and the four most common requests for teacher training course contents. Which are ①Lack of their own English skills (especially communicative skills as McConnell(2003) points out) ②Lack of teaching skills (especially communicative methodologies as Reesor(2002) points out) ③Lack of student motivation (Hiromori(2006) states that Japanese teachers at work are trying hard to motivate students by citing the writings of many educators.) ④Diversity of students in a classroom(especially in Japan, where they have large classes of approximately 40 students) as problems. Since the author believes teachers' aim to participate in the training program should be to solve their problems, teachers' request for contents of the program should reflect the problems. Therefore, the followings will be their requests. ①To improve their own English skills ②To improve their teaching skills ③To learn how to motivate students ④To learn how to deal with the diversity of
students. Next, they were compared with the results of the questionnaires which were conducted in 2006, when 78 teachers from 46 high schools were surveyed, and in 2007, when 72 teachers from 39 high schools were surveyed, targeting a total of 150 high school English teachers in Okinawa. Such a comparison indicates how well or bad a program organizer can grasp the demands of trainees. The questionnaire consists of two questions of "What are you concerned about in your class?" and "What do you expect from this seminar?", which were answered by writing freely by the teachers who participated in the English teachers' week-long intensive training program offered by Okinawa Prefecture Board of Education. The results of the surveys in 2006 and 2007 showed that teachers see three main problems in teaching: ① Students' low motivation to study English, ② Widely differing English levels among students (Diversity of students), and ③ Students' low English levels. The results also showed that there were three major requests by teachers for the contents of a training program: ① To improve their own English skills, ② To improve their teaching skills, and ③ To exchange information with other teachers. When these results were compared with the suppositions that the author proposed, "Students' low motivation" and "Diversity of students" were, in fact, the first and the second problems of the top three most common problems given. However, the third most commonly cited problem, "Students' low level of English" was one that the author did not expect as one of the major problems. Regarding the requests for the in-service training course contents, the author's supposition, "To improve English skills" and "To improve teaching skills" were first and second of the top requests. The request which placed third for the surveyed teachers, "To exchange with or get information from other teachers" was unexpected by the author as a major request. In conclusion, the survey results imply that an effective in-service training program for teachers should focus on at least three major goals: 1. To improve English skills of English teachers. 2. To improve teaching skills of English teachers. 3. To offer opportunities for teachers to exchange ideas with each other. Furthermore, the author presents how to accomplish these goals in organizing a training program.