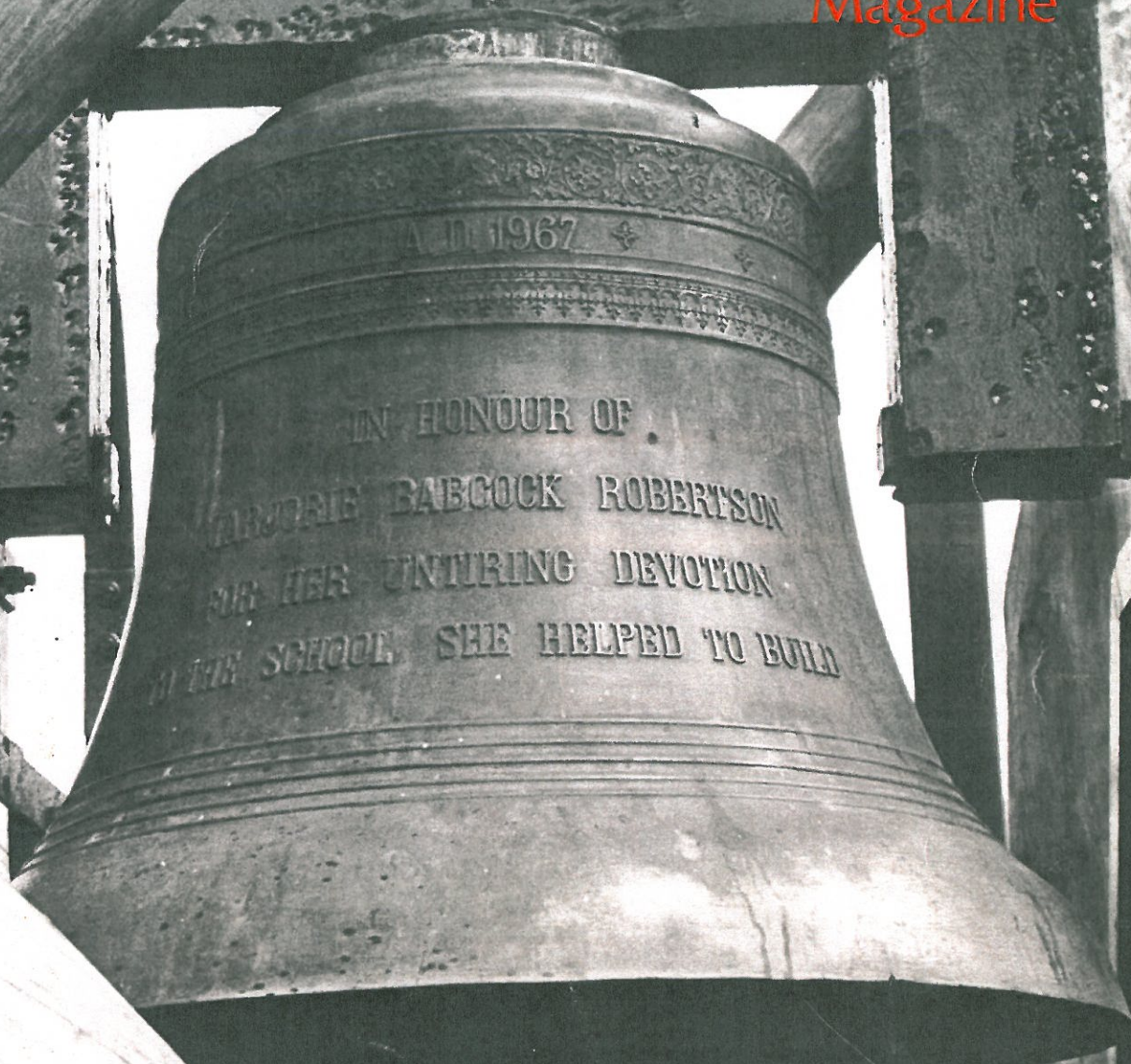


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The History of the Bells

In the classroom

Institute of English Studies: one year later

by Vance Stevens



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The Institute of English Studies, (IES) was established at the beginning of the 1983-4 school year in response to the needs of foreign students at HPA whose native language is not English. The purpose of the IES has been to provide intensive instruction in English in the hope that these students will eventually be able to enter at least the HPA certificate track program. As the IES instructor and director, I have an M.A. in ESL (English as a Second Language) and I have had nine years of experience teaching ESL in widely diverse educational and cultural settings.

Students come to the IES with a wide range of skills in English. Some are already able to communicate in everyday English but need help with grammar and writing and perhaps with comprehending content-laden lectures and readings in English. Others have much weaker backgrounds. These students take nothing but IES classes until they and their instructor feel they are ready to take classes in the regular program. Most IES students last year, for example, took one to three courses in the regular program during the spring semester. In general, after one semester in the IES, these students were able to cope fairly well with math and low

level English courses, but they had difficulty with history and government courses, which require extensive reading and sustained preparation outside class.

The IES program is very demanding on both me and the students for at least three reasons. Primarily, most of the students in the IES were experiencing living and studying away from home and/or in a foreign country for the first time in their lives. Certain strains were thus placed on the students. All students at HPA undergo some degree of stress from being away from their families and from having to confront the simultaneous challenges of maintaining acceptable academic standards while complying with rules, coping with dorm living, and fulfilling work and social obligations at HPA. IES students have to do all this plus deal with a foreign culture and often incomprehensible language. To the normal demands placed on students at HPA are added anomie and isolation; and also some frustration as the year progresses and there is still much work to do in order to become academically functional in English.

Two other reasons that the IES is extraordinarily demanding are that the students and I spend whole days together, and that the language levels (hence, needs) of the students are all different. These latter two demands are addressed in the way the class is structured. The course of instruction is made as eclectic as is possible (or at least as is imaginable), and students are channelled, when practical, into individualized and self-paced materials. This formula is complicated a little by the fact that during the first semester, when the students are always together, scheduling of activities outside of

class is more practical than during the second semester, when some students are in the regular program, and schedules are at odds.

Therefore, during the second semester, the emphasis is more on self-paced individual work than on class-oriented activities.

The course is loosely divided into the four skill areas of reading, writing, aural (listening and speaking), and grammar. These skills were taught as follows:

GRAMMAR—The first year, diagnostic testing showed that all IES students needed at least remedial work with grammar. This was therefore a constant element in the courses, with the students doing text-based exercises or working individually in workbooks.

AURAL SKILLS—Aural skills were practiced through lectures, filmstrips, and films from which the students took notes, and through a workbook accompanied by a tape on which natural, conversational English is recorded. In addition, students gave occasional oral reports, and always had to cope aurally with what was going on in class.

READING—At first, short reading passages written especially for ESL students were used, with accompanying exercises, to teach the skills necessary for successful reading. These gradually led into more difficult materials, which the students read at their own pace. Eventually, the students were reporting on books they had checked out of the library and doing exercises based on articles found in Time Magazine and in local newspapers. Another interesting reading experience occurred early in the year when the students read "Our Town," and then saw the play performed by HPA's theatrical group.

WRITING—Almost always during the year, IES students were at some stage of composing or revising at least one composition; sometimes they were at different stages in more than one composition. Various process-based techniques were used to facilitate writing. For example, students kept journals, did freewritings, read and commented on each other's work, and formed discussion groups. Writing tasks were often based on impressions of class trips. Sometimes, we took trips just to stimulate writing; for example, one morning, we visited the petroglyph fields at Puako and Anaehoomalu, with students jotting their impressions on the spot. Other tasks were based on reading, and all IES students prepared research papers at the end of each semester. On a number of occasions, IES students have written articles for the Kamakani, the HPA school newspaper.

The computer was an integral part of the writing process in the IES this past year. Students did most of their serious writing, and of course revision, using DECWORD on the school's DEC computer. Learning how to use the system provided a context for a task-directed language exercise at various times during the year. The computer was also used incidentally throughout the year. For example, students played "Animals" and reported on their experiences with that interactive game. Additionally, I brought an Apple II from home and let the students use some of my ESL programs. This year, we have four microcomputers available in a lab environment. Since my specialty within my broader field of ESL is computer-assisted language learning, extensive use is planned by the IES for those computers, pending a modest amount of funding for software.

Many other class activities helped to break the daily routine and provide language-rich contexts for enjoyable learning experiences. I occasionally brought my guitar to class, and the students would chime in on songs ranging from the Beatles and Simon and Garfunkel to Jethro Tull and Led Zepplin. Marathon Monopoly games

provided excellent opportunities for the students to interact on an amicably competitive basis, and the students also enjoyed frequent rounds of Scrabble. At other odd moments, the students solved puzzles, like reordering chopped up cartoon strips. The whole last week of class was devoted to creating and laying out the first IES class yearbook, an endeavor in which the students took some pride, and from which they derived a memorable souvenir and a heightened sense of accomplishment and of their success with English.

Some of the most memorable experiences this past year took place outside of class. There were numerous cookouts at my house, and one at Hapuna Beach, where we all spent the night in the cabins there. As a class, we attended one of the rodeos in Paniolo Park just outside Waimea. We studied about Captain Cook's arrival on the Big Island in class, and then took a trip to Kealahou Bay, where Cook anchored and was eventually slain. We stopped also by the nearby historic site of Puuhonua o Honaunau. Our most ambitious outing was a two-day round-island adventure during which we stayed at a motel near South Point and spent the following day exploring the volcano park. When Mauna Loa erupted, the IES students returned to the park for an evening of observing the fountaining and lava flows. But the most popular kind of excursion of all for the IES students were simply trips to Kona for a movie, a visit to the game center, and a meal at McDonald's.

Although this past year was in many ways successful and productive for the students, the first year of any program is in some respects one of trial and error. From observing the program in operation this first year, we see that certain areas could be improved.

First, we need to better address the problem of anomie and isolation to which IES students were especially prone by integrating them more than was done the first year into all aspects of the school. Also, greater identity with a particular class will be encouraged, primarily through tentative placement with

the class that each student would be expected to graduate in, were each student to continue at HPA after a year in the IES. Furthermore, in response to the particular needs of all foreign students at HPA, a Foreign Student Advisor will be appointed in 1984-85. In future years, assuming the IES grows steadily, it might be advisable to have an on-campus advisor. I have also encouraged faculty to invite our foreign students on class and advisee outings. There is now support among the faculty for finding each of the IES students a native-speaking "buddy": a special friend with an interest in cross-cultural encounters who would meet regularly with an individual IES student and support that student when needed.

Also, the IES is continually seeking opportunities to immerse its students into academically-oriented language experiences. This past year, we visited a few classes in the regular program, and we would like to do even more of that next year. It would be particularly helpful to have the students exposed regularly to several teaching "voices," and toward this end, continued cooperation will be sought from the various departments at HPA (particularly math and art) in placing IES students into appropriate classes. In return, the IES would like to evolve into a resource at HPA which would be able to provide remedial instruction to any student having second-language problems with English.

The IES is fast becoming accepted as a fixture in the unique multi-cultural, international milieu of HPA. Faculty and students are just beginning to respond positively to its presence. We in the IES welcome this trend, and hope to be able to blend more fully into the routine at HPA, and thus to contribute even more significantly to the school in coming years.