Chapter 2

Global Teacher Training Based on a Multiple Perspective Assessment: A Knowledge Building Community for Future Assistant Language Teachers

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this project is to design and implement Web-based collaborative environments for a global training based on a multiple perspective assessment for future and novice ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers) who will come to Japan from various parts of the world. The system was created in order to give better chances to acquire professional knowledge in advance with support from experienced senior teachers, both Japanese teachers and former ALTs. Computer Support for Collaborative Learning (CSCL) was adopted as a platform for their online discussion with much focus on multiple perspective assessment to support social and personalized aspects such as individual accountability and contribution to the collaboration. Initial results are reported using the analysis of system design and the Web-based questionnaire answered by the participants involved in this knowledge-building forum.

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INTRODUCTION

The ALTs are young overseas graduates who assist in international exchange and foreign language instruction in local governments, boards of education, as well as junior and senior high schools in Japan. Their main job is to work on team-teaching lessons in cooperation with the JTE (Japanese Teachers of English) in English classes. There has been recently, however, a pressing need to propose more effective preparation for ALTs on a practical level in Japan, since the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan, announced in 2002 that the number of ALTs should be increased to the unprecedented number of over 8400. The New Course of Study, revised in 2008, has raised this need by introducing elementary school English. Even at this level, ALTs are expected to teach basic communicative skills. To cope with this rapid increase, however, surprisingly few projects have been carried out for professional training in the recent years within the educational arena of ELT (English Language Teaching) in Japan.

This paper discusses effective ways to meet the above-mentioned pressing need, with regard to appropriate preparation based on the questionnaire survey given to 119 ALTs and 119 JTEs in Japan (Kushima & Nishihori, 2006). ALTs have little job training on a practical level at the orientation sessions offered at present, and virtually no individual preparation is provided for them before coming to Japan (see Figure 1).

ALTs answered the question of what they thought was “Necessary information for ALTs before coming to Japan” (see Table 1).

ALTs viewed the most necessary preparations for them as being “awareness of the actuality of team-teaching lessons in Japan,” “awareness of the purpose of team-teaching as part of English lessons in Japan”, and “what a Japanese teacher’s job actually entails” (see Table 1). With regard to what ALTs actually prepared, the information above shows us that the response rate for the answer “Collecting information about team-teaching lessons” was low, 4.8% (see Figure 1). This leads us to the most likely explanation that ALTs only recognized the importance of this after arriving at their assigned school. Namely, they could not accurately envisage how their actual job was going to be.

To help ameliorate this situation, our system creates a knowledge building community, where individual accountability of knowledge development and contributions can be illustrated from multiple perspectives. This forum offers a good opportunity for future ALTs to undergo pre-training and join the teachers’ community in advance.

Figure 1. What ALTs actually prepared before coming to Japan

1. Collecting information about experiences of those who were ALTs
2. Learning Japanese
3. Training as a language teacher
4. Collecting information about team-teaching lessons
5. Collecting information about language education
6. Collecting information about Japanese education
7. Collecting information about Japanese life and culture
8. Other
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