GRANT PROPOSAL

Overview

This project explores the best suitable teaching materials that are compatible with the Monbusho’s “Comprehensive Learning”. Fukuoka University of Education will take the leadership in the project, gathering school teachers from all over Kyushu (mainly Fukuoka) as the project members. The project tries to provide a solution to two of the insufficiency in present education in Japan: insufficient teaching materials and insufficient experience of teachers. The team develops teaching materials that enhance the learners' understanding of the U. S. in the subject of Social Studies as the main concern and in the Comprehensive Learning between Social Studies and English as the secondary interest. The project also aims at establishing connections between schools in the U. S. and Japan so that in future teachers can communicate each other via email. The team tries to achieve this by visiting the U. S., which also give the project members the chance to “feel” America as it is. The project starts in April 1999, and completes in March 2002.

Statement of Need

(Introduction)

At present the United States and Japan are two of the leading (and hence the most important) developed countries in the world. The interaction between these two countries has significant effect on the international relationships and world affairs of the rest of the world. Towards the 21st century association of the U. S. with Japan will become more and more essential to global interaction. In the next century we expect some big changes in political and economical aspects; in addition, it is also highly likely that we are facing even greater innovation and advancements in the information processing and network. This not only creates new international relationships, but strengthens the need of deeper individual interactions among people in different nations and/or cultures. This in turn heightens the necessity of understanding each other both cross-culturally and individually.

(Present situation and perspective for the 21st century)

Education can take a great part in answering this demand. This situation is actually expected of schools in Japan. In the new version of the “Course of Study” (issued by the Ministry of Education, or “Monbusho”) revised for the year 2002 and later for primary/junior high curricula, and for the 2003 and later for high school curricula, the aim of “Comprehensive Learning” is already set, with some strength on it, for primary and junior high school education. “Comprehensive Learning”, according to the new Course of Study, includes intercultural understanding and communication, and
information processing, along with environmental problem, welfare education, voluntary activities, and other social issues. “Comprehensive Learning” refers to education where there is no wall between school subjects. For instance, “intercultural understanding” abstracts away the barrier between Social Studies and English. Learners must learn to communicate and understand cultures at the same time. This education aims at increasing ability to apply to the society what they’ve learned, and to understand how things work in the real world.

(Need 1: Appropriate materials)
However, education in Japan lacks teaching materials that are compatible and that can cope with such an aim. In fact, Ministry Authorized Textbooks (MATs) for Social Studies subject has been fixed in content, without a major change, for many years. They merely sweep over the “surface” of America. For example, agricultural production in the U. S., is rather oversimplified. The MATs talk about the efficiency in equilibrium pattern of agro-production, but they do not mention the background for this efficiency, how it is achieved, or why it has been successful. For other topics the MATs also do not “show”, but end in just “telling”. Therefore, we need teaching materials that are flexible in use, show what is really going on in America, make learners realize the relevant problems, and encourage peer discussions. In order to offer up-to-date materials in this quickly changing world, the utilization of Internet and World Wide Web would be appropriate. The form of the resources should be most efficient if they could be presented on the Internet, so that they would be ready to be devised into full materials.

(Need 2: Right teachers)
In addition, there are very few teachers (especially in Kyushu) with direct experience of actually “touching” American culture. It may be true that more people visit America, but usually the visit is a package tour whose itinerary does not really let the tourists experience real America. Often teachers lacking in direct experience have to resort to using only secondary resources when they try to develop a teaching material. This is because rarely do they have firsthand information: “secondary” in the sense that it is accessed through books and references such as encyclopedias, demographic statistics, government publications, and so on — magazines and newspapers at best. But materials designed through such a procedure are usually uninteresting, lacking in vividness, biassed, and even, in some cases, incorrect. In order to carry out what Monbusho has in mind, in order for the learners to really understand the situation in the U.S., teachers are required to discover it by themselves and to be equipped with direct experience.

(Need 3: Suitable material-designing environment)
Finally, to sustain the expected effect of the proposal, teachers and researchers in Japan should keep corresponding with people and schools in the U.S., and should keep updating the resources at hand. It would be terribly costly if they continue to go to and
fro between the two countries. Once a good relationship is established in one trip, that relation should remain. This relationship has a further advantage in that it is a school-to-school, person-to-person connection. This can be achieved by using Internet web sites and emails. Traditionally, understanding the U.S. has been considered “enough” if it is done through governmental association: in other words, the scale has been too big. The smaller the scale is, the more active the communication will be. We can expect exchanging honest opinions, truer feeling, and more efficient cooperations with smaller scale relationships. One single trip will enable this for each region, with a proviso that it be well-planned and organized.

(Conclusion)
In order to answer these needs, we will have to actually see the situation in the U. S., establish good relations with individuals and schools, carefully plan the trips, and get necessary equipments and skills to disseminate. For the comprehensive understanding of America, nearly all areas should be covered in the trips. However, with the present allowance from Monbusho, this does not sound realistic. We need more funds to achieve the above goals. We request your grant to support our project.

Expected Outcome

(Improved quality of the project members)
First of all, the project members will significantly increase their skills of developing teaching materials. In particular, they are teaching materials that are integrated (in the sense that they can be taught in English classes as well as Social Studies classes), that aim also at increasing skills in information processing, and Comprehensive Learning. Since the present project emphasizes the importance of developing such teaching materials, the project members are naturally involved in thinking about how to do it, what should be presented to the students, and/or how to introduce a topic in a given class. By the time the project completes in three years, they will have acquired much knowledge and methodologies to produce meaningful materials. Please be reminded that the project members are all experts and they represent education field in Kyushu. The effect will be enlarged by the connections established with the American people and schools.

(Improved quality of the school teachers in Kyushu)
Second, we can expect the improved qualities of the teachers in general in Kyushu area. They will have easier access to much more information that is both handy and useful on Internet. The fact that such information is on a web site will be propagated through the wide network of teachers. The organized materials are fully informative, authentic, and vivid (because they are fresh and new in nature). Therefore the teachers can learn what is really going on in present America. In addition, since the information is ready-to-use on Internet, this enables the teachers to develop the syllabi
easily, while spending the spared time on other necessary tasks. Furthermore, teachers who are not literate in computer will learn how to use Internet if they find the materials on the web site very useful. Moreover, they can use emails to communicate directly with people and schools in America. When they come up with questions in the course of their research, they can always contact promptly via the email correspondence.

(Boards of Education)
Third, we can expect the Boards of Education to support our project. Gathering teachers from four different prefectures (Fukuoka, Saga, Nagasaki, and Oita), we get cooperations from four Boards of Educations in return for providing information for them. The boards of Education can help disseminate the achievement of the project in two ways. First, they will officially backup and support our project. This will make the project team’s activities easier in various aspects. Second, they will help distribute the annual reports produced by the team. The Boards of Education will circulate the reports in such a way that the findings of the project will spread quickly and widely across Kyushu.

(Learners)
Finally, learners will get the most benefit. They will increase interests and concern towards the U. S. through “Comprehensive Learning” scheme conducted by well-skilled teachers who present the materials explicitly and carefully designed for this purpose. Motivated students can learn more, since they participate in class more actively. They will have deeper understanding of the U. S., fostering broad and flexible mind. This is exactly what we and Monbusho are looking for.

About the Applying Institution

(Introduction)
Fukuoka University of Education is particularly suitable for the project because it plays a central role in quite a wide range of teachers’ as well as researchers’ network in the Kyushu district. First, it is “central” in that it is the one and only university that specializes in teacher-training in Kyushu area. Secondly, it holds primary schools and junior high schools in three districts within Fukuoka prefecture. Therefore it offers wide-range teachers’ and researchers’ network in Fukuoka area. In fact the network extends all over Kyushu by virtue of the university’s status as a sole facility that specializes in teacher-training in Kyushu.

(The University)
Fukuoka University of Education, unlike other Kyushu universities with a faculty of Education, specializes in producing mainly primary/junior high teachers. Therefore it plays a leading role in teacher-training field in Kyushu. For instance, students come
from all over (and from around) Kyushu and go back (after graduation) to their own prefecture as well-skilled teachers. The University is also famous for its unique facility, namely, Research and Guidance Center for Teaching Practice. The Center aims at developing theoretical/applied research on education, as well as practicing it. Researchers and teachers in Kyushu (and other parts of Japan) meet here on many occasions such as regularly held conferences and workshops.

(The attached schools)
The attached schools also function as leading facilities in the primary and junior high education in Fukuoka prefecture. They are located in Kokura, Fukuoka, and Kurume, three of the most important cities in Fukuoka. These schools practice teaching theories and methodologies, and discuss the courses of study and curricula through joint studies with the researchers of the University. Since many school teachers all over Kyushu participate in the discussions/workshops/conferences, they also have wide-range teacher-to-teacher network. In addition to this, the teachers in these schools are also researchers, when many school teachers end up in teaching per se, and do not get actively involved in doing joint research. In this sense, the staff members working in the attached schools have researcher-to-researcher network as well. This in turn makes them function as a medium for researcher-to-teacher relationships.

(The personnel)
The personnel involved are well qualified. Three members from Fukuoka University of Education will function as leaders in the project. Two of them specialize in geographic education, one with population geography and the other with urban geography, plus one who specializes in English education:

- Masanori Ishiguro (Professor, geographic education, population geography)
- Tetsuji Ishimaru (Professor, geographic education, urban geography)
- Toru Nakashima (Professor, English education, phonetics and phonology)

The rest of the members are all teachers (primary, junior high, and senior high school teachers) who specialize in the subjects of Social Studies and English. They come from Primary/Junior High School Attached to Fukuoka University of Education, and from schools in Saga, Nagasaki, and Oita prefectures. The cooperation of these members who are experts in Social Studies and English teaching will produce teaching materials suitable for “Comprehensive Learning” promoted by Monbusho.

(Conclusion)
Fukuoka University of Education as the applying institute, plus the project members are suitable for the project because (1) they represent the education facilities and teaching staff in Kyushu, and (2) they are all experienced, fully qualified teachers at leading teaching facilities. Therefore, the project has a big impact on Kyushu-wide teaching and methodology field.
Project Description

(Methods)
To achieve the above goals, we outline the three-year project as follows.

1 In order to grasp the U. S. as a whole, we will divide it into three areas and visit one area per year.

1st cycle: Eastern coast region: Anatomy of Megalopolis
2nd cycle: Central-west region: Farming and Industry/Old American Life-styles
3rd cycle: Western coast region: Ethnicity and Multi-culture

2 The three-year-project starts in April 1999, and completes in March 2002. One cycle completes in a year. Each cycle has three phases. We plan the schedule for one cycle as follows:

Phase 1: Planning
April to July Members meet monthly to plan/discuss.
June Project leaders visit the U. S. in advance.

Phase 2: Fieldwork-visit
August The team visits the U. S. to do field research.

Phase 3: Developing/publicizing
October to December Members meet monthly to prepare for the material design.
January to March The team publicizes its findings in the form of paper, presentations in workshops/conferences, and Web site.

3 (Phase 1: Planning) The team carefully plans the visit to make it successful.

- The team discusses what type of information to look for, what kind of people to meet, what sort of aspect in a particular issue to be shed light on, and so on.
- The team organizes the workshops/seminars/lectures/talks to hold in America: it plans who to invite as lecturers and where to have the conferences according to the team’s specific goals.
- The team develops tryout materials so that it will be able to give presentations during the visits to schools, facilities, etc. and get feedback
from the local people.

- The project leaders visit the U. S. prior to the discussions with the whole teams so that they will have some background information. This will help make each of the members’ purpose of the visit more explicit.
- In preparing for the visit, the team members bear in mind that the completed materials should reflect “Comprehensive Learning” scheme put forward by the Ministry of Education. The team members, comprised of teachers of Social Studies and English, collaborate in devising teaching materials that are not limited to one of the school subjects.

4 (Phase 2: Fieldwork-visit) The project team visits the U. S. so that it can develop teaching materials for the subjects Social Studies (which includes Geography, History, and Civics) and English, that will enhance learner’s profound understanding of the United States. (For the first cycle (1999) details, see “(The first cycle)” section.)

- The project team visits schools and facilities in the U. S. and collects resources and data so that they can develop appropriate teaching materials.
- In the visits, the team carries out researches that are carefully planned in discussions and seminars in Japan.
- The team takes part in workshops/seminars/lectures/talks organized in advance.
- The team gives presentations of the tryout teaching materials that are planned in advance, and get feedback from the local teachers.
- The team establishes good relationships with people/schools/facilities for future correspondence.

5 (Phase 3: Development/publicizing) Internet/World Wide Web/emails, as well as the members’ communication in the teachers’ network, will be used to sustain and disseminate the effects of the project. The medium is used for direct communication between the teachers in the U. S. and in Japan.

- After each visit, the teams get together to plan and create Web sites that offer what they found and learned in the visit.
- The team publicizes the findings and the developed teaching materials in report booklets.
- The team members propagate/promote/proliferate what they did in the project.

6 In order to make use of the limited time, we divide the whole team into four sub-teams, each consisting of three teachers of that school type.
Sub-teams 1 and 2: Junior high school material designing team
Sub-team 3: Primary school material designing team
Sub-team 4: Senior high school material designing team

Each sub-team develops materials for its target learners, and keeps the members as it is for all phases and all cycles.

7 Apart from the topic and the areas to be covered, the project proceeds in the same manner for EACH YEAR as described.

(The first year (1999))
In the first year, we aim for the versatile understanding of the North-east region as a metropolitan area, which functions as a center of the politics and economy in the U. S. The theme will be “Anatomy of Megalopolis.” The team as a whole visits New York and Washington, gathers information and does the research as planned, specifically;

In New York:
The Board of Education, Universities, Junior High Schools, The United Nations, etc.

In Washington D. C.:
The Board of Education (if necessary), Universities, Junior High Schools, White House, National Museum of American History, etc.

Then the sub-teams spread over various areas within the region, each conducting modular fieldwork, according to its topics and purposes planned separately. Each sub-team will have the common core activities:

- Visit junior high schools and discuss with the local teachers, get feedback of the tryout materials
- Visit homes of the local people and get opinions and ideas, grasp individual lifestyles
- Visit facilities (metropolitan facilities, economic system, politics system, horticulture applying facilities, transportation and communication network)

Although the detailed topics/purposes will be decided in the course of monthly discussions, possible topics will fall under the following categories:

Sub-teams 1 and 2: Material designing for Geography, History, and Civics
Sub-team 3: Material designing for Life-styles
Sub-team 4: Material designing for Geography

(Uniqueness of the project)

- School teachers actually visit the U. S. and collect firsthand resources through experiencing them directly. This enables designing teaching materials that are authentic, vivid in nature, and true to the present situation. This in turn enhances students’ motivation and understanding.

- The completed materials are in congruent with the Monbusho’s “Comprehensive Learning.” This idea itself is novel in Japanese education system, so the project will function as a leading guide to the rest of the teachers and schools in the whole nation.

- The project makes good use of Internet. This will activate the introduction of Internet in the education field. It improves the situation of the education in Japan where the curricula do not reflect the “information age.”

- The project targets at particular areas and fields in the United States, and aims at teaching materials that would enhance concrete/specific understanding of the country. This complements the “surface-learning” in Ministry Authorized Textbooks. It also supplements general and ambiguous syllabi in the MAT.

Project Timeline (for the first year (1999))

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