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## ***The Web as a Means of Educational Delivery***

So once training needs are identified, and a training curriculum developed, how can the educational package be delivered? Actually, this is an almost ideal situation for Web-based training: 1) the educational gap is new and widespread; 2) the problem is immediate and has no pre-existing infrastructure to fill it; 3) the learners are self-directed, similar, and highly motivated; and 4) Japan is going on-line at a phenomenal rate. In fact, in regard to the latter, according to the Internet Whitepaper 2001, from February, 2000 to February, 2001, the number of Japanese Internet users rose to 32.6 million, representing a 68.5 percent increase over the same period last year (IDG June 26, 2001, para 1). By comparison, although the proportion of total Americans on-line is slightly greater, with 102.1 million, the number of people going online from U.S. homes only rose 16 percent from July 2000 to July 2001 (Mariano August 14, 2001, para 2).

The idea of using the Web to provide specialized training is hardly new. Industry has been shifting to this medium a surprising rate. In 1999, 41% of large organizations had some sort of on-line training, and 92% planned to implement it by the end of the year (Horton, 2000, p. 9). Likewise, trend analysis shows that by 2007, almost half of all university students will be taking part of their courses through distance education technologies. Therefore, by setting up a well-designed Web site that utilizes the information from the needs assessment, we can deliver the kind of training needed all across Japan, almost immediately and at relatively little expense. Such a site should not just be a book-based course put on line. It should use the synchronous and asynchronous technologies to foster interaction as well.

## ***Conclusion***

The problem that faces us, finding a way to train tens of thousands of elementary school teachers on how to teach English to children, can be solved in a way not possible even five years ago: through Web-based training. New technologies alone, however, will not accomplish this task. We must first extract all we can about teaching children from the literature. We should also conduct rigorous needs assessments of both self-perceived and predicted needs.

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answers are offered. A questionnaire approach then, can only be effective when the training needs have already been established and the researchers are just trying to identify frequencies in the population.

Second, there is a built-in fallacy in asking someone who needs training to become a specialist in determining what those needs are. Hiemstra and Long, in 1974 (cited in Cameron, 1988), found large discrepancies between the “felt” needs physical therapists identified on a questionnaire and their “real” needs as measured by testing. Most self-assessment inventories are really just interest inventories, where interests are mistaken for needs (Cameron, 1988).

Therefore, if questionnaires cannot identify training needs, what can? I would like to suggest a two-pronged approach, using focus groups to identify “self-perceived” training needs, and diagnostic methods to identify “predicted” training needs.

Self-predicted needs can be discovered through focus group interviews. As Morgan (1997) points out, the general rule of thumb for planning a focus group is to have 6-10 participants who are “homogeneous strangers,” and conduct 3-5 groups per project (p. 34). The facilitator asks preplanned questions to start a discussion, which is then guided by further questions (Morgan, 1997). Sample selection is a key factor in reliability, although, in our case, since the population of elementary school teachers is fairly uniform, assembling a good sample should not be a problem.

Focus groups have proven extremely useful for product development and marketing studies, and they will probably also produce a rich assortment of training needs, but again, the same problem with questionnaires comes into play: How can inexpert respondents identify their own training needs? Therefore, a focus group interview approach to identify “self-perceived needs” should be balanced with a second approach combining a diagnostic approach to identify “predicted” needs, and directed interviews. A list of predicted training needs for elementary school English teachers can be developed in three ways: by looking at the literature, by having a panel of subject matter specialists generate a list of needs, or hopefully, by combining the two. Teachers can be interviewed on these predicted needs, thereby increasing reliability, texture, and depth (Caffarella, 1994; Nowlen, 1980).

A preliminary list of predicted training needs from my own research can be organized into seven topical areas:

- 1) Theories on how children learn languages
- 2) An understanding of what kind of English should be taught
- 3) An understanding of Monbukagakusho policies
- 4) An understanding of EFL methodologies
- 5) EFL activities for children
- 6) Evaluating and utilizing ones existing strengths and weaknesses
- 7) Designing and planning lessons

what curriculum should be used. Instead, and very unlike any educational guidelines they have ever produced before, the Ministry has left these decisions up to the elementary schools themselves, thereby adding to their malaise. Therefore, the rather sudden decision to reform elementary education to include English teaching has created a low-level national crisis: How can Japan's existing workforce of elementary school teachers be given the competencies needed to become elementary English teachers?

Taiwan's Ministry of Education faced a similar problem a few years ago and set up an extensive training program for teachers. Unfortunately, such efforts face numerous problems. First of all, there is a fair amount of literature on how to teach children English, but most of this literature was developed in the West and is not appropriate for the Asian EFL situation. Second, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan do not have the infrastructure to conduct extensive training. There are few specialists and meager budgets. Third, and most important, whereas we have a fairly clear idea of what skills junior high EFL teachers need, the same is not true for elementary school teachers. Setting up a training program for elementary school teachers based on junior high English teaching methods might end up doing more harm than good.

Here, then, is the crux of the problem and its solution: We need to dig into the literature and find out everything we can about teaching children English. Then, we need to conduct a needs assessment on the training needs of Japanese elementary school teachers. And finally, once we figure out what we need to teach, we must find a means of delivery that can reach elementary school teachers all across Japan.

Fortunately, two of these problems are easy to solve. The literature, although biased towards situations in the West, is well-developed and easily accessible. (In fact, if you were to read one book on teaching children English, I would recommend Lynn Cameron's *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*, Cambridge University Press). As for the means of delivery, as I will explain later, we are entering an age in which massive, widespread training can be conducted even if the infrastructure does not exist. It is the third problem, then, finding the training needs of elementary school teachers that we must focus our attention on.

### ***Determining training needs***

Needs assessment is an old science in the field of education, dating back to at least Tyler's 1949 groundbreaking article on curriculum design, but it seems to have reached a sort of heyday in the eighties. Unfortunately, only a fraction of the needs assessments conducted are effective. Not many people are trained in the technique, and an in-depth assessment requires financial expenditures that few institutions are willing to put out. Therefore, when most people need to find something out, they use one of the least reliable tools of needs assessment – a questionnaire – usually hastily thrown together, biased towards the views of its creator, and administered on a sample that does not represent the larger population.

Even when a high degree of scientific rigor exists, two problems with using questionnaires to determine training needs are unavoidable. First, questionnaires can only be effective if the right questions are asked, and with a close-ended questionnaire, when the right

## ***Biodata***

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## **Training Japanese Elementary School Teachers to Teach English – Curtis Kelly**

### ***Abstract***

As of this year, tens of thousands of Japanese elementary school teachers have been assigned to teach English. Most have had no training in language teaching and are desperate for ideas. This paper will begin with a simple analysis of the situation and continue by proposing a three part means to satisfy this nationwide teacher training deficit: 1) an extensive review of the literature, 2) an assessment of self-perceived and predicted training needs, and 3) development of a Web-based training site.

### ***The situation***

After decades of complaints about the poor quality of public education in Japan (Yomiuri, 2000), especially in relation to English (Mulvey 2001, July), the Japanese Ministry of Education has begun what they claim is their greatest reform since the end of the World War Two (Kelly, 1998; Monbukagakusho - Ministry of Education 2001; Simmons, Yonally et al. 1995). One of the most important changes, following similar moves in Korea and Taiwan, is the addition of English to elementary curriculum. The Ministry is not really specifying that English be taught; they are merely creating the opportunity by adding “The Period of Integrated Studies” (Gakushutekina Jikan), but English teaching is certainly the most common use of this class (Monbukagakusho - Ministry of Education 2001). “

The new policy might eventually bear fruit, but for now, it just represents a dilemma for elementary school administrators. Due to the strict licensing and hiring system for elementary school teachers in Japan, very few of Japan's currently employed 416,000 elementary teachers have had training in how to teach English (Monbukagakusho, 1999, p. 150). Thus, all across Japan, tens of thousands of elementary school teachers, who were recently informed that they have to teach English in 2002, are in a quandary as to how to proceed.

Even the Ministry of Education itself seems to be caught off-guard with its new policy. Although they have designated a number of schools as pilot schools, and they have recently released the informative Practical Handbook for Elementary School English Activities (Shogakko Eigo katsudo jissen no tebiki; Monbukagakusho, 2001), they have not clearly designated at what grade English education should begin, how much teaching should be done, or