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著者	ONO Masatsugu, KRAUSE-ONO Margit, TAQUET David, KURIYAMA Masaki
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Collaborative Language Learning through Cross-Cultural Understanding among Japanese and International Students in Regional Technical Colleges

Masatsugu Ono

College of Liberal Arts,
Muroran Institute of Technology

27-1, Mizumoto-cho., Muroran,
Hokkaido, 050-8585 Japan
onomasa@mmm.muroran-it.ac.jp

Margit Krause=Ono

College of Liberal Arts,
Muroran Institute of Technology

27-1, Mizumoto-cho., Muroran,
Hokkaido, 050-8585 Japan
k-ono@mmm.muroran-it.ac.jp

David Taquet

Department of Humanities,
National Institute of Technology
Hakodate College

14-1, Tokura-cho, Hakodate,
Hokkaido, 042-8501 Japan
dtaquet@hakodate-ct.ac.jp

Masaki Kuriyama

Department of Engineering for Innovation,
National Institute of Technology
Tomakomai College

443, Nishikioka, Tomakomai,
Hokkaido, 059-1275 Japan
kuriyama@tomakomai-ct.ac.jp

Abstract

This is a practical report of our research project on language learning through cross-cultural understanding among Japanese and international students in regional technical colleges in Japan. The goal of this educational practice is to improve the followings; students' opportunities to encounter a multiracial, multilingual and multicultural environment, to use foreign languages, and to understand cross-cultural affairs. In order to achieve this goal, we tried to conduct lessons by virtual videolink meetings as well as real face-to-face camps.

Japanese government has been promoting the entry of international students and researchers to all universities. Now Japan has over 200,000 students from overseas. As almost half of them enter huge universities in the Tokyo metropolitan area and each university campus is adjacent, domestic or Japanese students in the area can easily meet with international students in order to have a chance at intercultural exchange. However, the other half enter provincial universities and colleges. Hokkaido is one of 47 prefectures in Japan, and also a regional, broad area, away from Tokyo. Universities and Colleges in Hokkaido are much smaller than the ones in Tokyo metropolitan area in particular. Hokkaido only has fewer than 3,000 foreign students in total and each university has a limited number of international students, scattered all around the Hokkaido area. In addition, those universities and colleges are distant from each other by 50-200 km. This means students in urban area like Tokyo have enough opportunity to encounter foreigners in and out of the campus, but on the other hand, students in regional areas like Hokkaido have much less opportunities to meet foreigners. The authors came to recognize that this might be a big problem to motivate second language learning and to understand the importance of cross-cultural understanding from the viewpoint of learning environment.

In this project, the authors tried to build a new learning environment so that even students in regional universities and colleges could encounter cross-cultural environment just as students in Tokyo metropolitan area have. They chose three provincial cities, Muroran, Tomakomai, and Hakodate, which are all located in Hokkaido prefecture. Each city is a neighbor city but away from others by 50-200km. To make the most use of a limited number of international students who belong to each provincial university or college as a resource of intercultural exchange, the authors suggested and introduced a quasi-interactive environment of a ICT, videolink space as well as a face-to-face training camps. In the future, the author hope to demonstrate the educational effectiveness of ICT-based interactions similar to face-to-face interactions.

Keywords:

Regional Colleges, International Students, Cross-Cultural Understanding, Videolink Space, Face-to-Face Training Camp