

The Impact of Short Visit Program to Learners on International Collaborative Project ~A Case Study of J-CaJa~

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Abstract: Education is changing these years in Japan through developments in information and communication technologies (ICT) and globalization. It is no longer enough to provide just knowledge in the classroom but also to provide social skills such as communication ability, management skill, and intercultural understanding. Because of this perspective, Project-Based Learning (PBL) is one of the practices to provide social skills to students. Because of developments in ICT, now it is easy to communicate with those who are in remote places. International collaborative projects are very popular in PBL. In these practices, students build relationships with foreigners and accomplish their goals collaborating with each other. When they are in domestic situations, ICT tools such as SNS or teleconference systems play a very important role to maintain their relationships. However, activities that are done in a collaboration country are still an important part for encouraging students to learn. In this research, we will analyze how activities in a collaboration country affect students from a viewpoint of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP), using the J-CaJa project as an example of PBL.

Keywords: *Project-Based Learning (PBL), international collaborative project, Legitimate Peripheral Participation(LPP), Short Visit (SV) program*

Introduction

Rapid developments in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and globalization are changing school education in all over the world. In Japan, information literacy and intercultural understanding are given much attention. To provide those skills to students, collaborative learning, intercultural learning, or service learning are often practiced. Project-Based Learning (PBL) is now becoming popular in Japanese higher education. Through PBL, students can learn social skills, which cannot be easily attained in a regular university curriculum in university. In PBL, they will learn while actual feeling that they are connecting with others and contributing to society.

Students in a laboratory of informatics in Kansai University designed collaborative PBL with foreign universities. One of these projects is called J-CaJa project. In this project, students aim for an international educational support for Cambodia with Cambodian students and NGOs by designing international exchange studies or providing a library to elementary schools. The students have the opportunity to visit Cambodia (Short Visit program: SV program) twice a year, and when they are in domestic, they prepare for SV program. The SV program plays a very important role for the students because it can become the main opportunity to practice their activity and achieve their goals. However, the SV program can be even more important than that. Comparing students before and after SV program, they obviously change their behavior. In this paper, we clarify how the SV program affects the students in terms of learning from the perspective of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP).

Research Background

Introduction of J-CaJa

J-CaJa is a student group, which mainly consists of Kansai University students who study at Kubota/Kurokami laboratory. They provide educational support for Cambodia. They mainly work as follows:

1. Library project: In this project, J-CaJa collaborates with a local NGO to set up a library at elementary schools in the local area. They provide picture books and teacher training for continuous library management. So far, they have established two libraries.
2. Support of international exchange studies: J-CaJa supports international exchange studies between Japanese children and Cambodian children. They collaborate with university students in Cambodia to provide effective exchange studies to the children in both countries. Both Japanese and Cambodian teachers of the children are deeply involved in this practice.

J-CaJa visits Cambodia twice a year for about 2weeks each (SV program). In Japan, they have a weekly meeting to prepare for SV program. Moreover, they communicate with Cambodian cooperators through a Facebook group and sometimes through as well. Through those projects and collaborations, they learn social skills such as how to manage an organization and how to communicate with people in a different culture.

What is learning?

From the perspective of LPP, learning is not simple acquisition of structure but the process that learners are becoming able to participate in works of the community (Lave, Wenger 1991). Lave and Wenger (1993) mentioned apprenticeship workplaces such as a tailor or a steersman and mutual self-help alcoholic group which as communities of practice. LPP is one of characteristics of practice that we can see in not only training or apprenticeship workplaces but also various kinds of activities. Once learners participate in a community of practice, they start from peripheral participation, an initial part of participation, which requires limited responsibility. Then they develop increased resources for understanding such as information and opportunity, by establishing relationships within activities, skilled individuals, and other members of the community of practice. As a result, they approach full participation to social and cultural practice or part of community getting through change of position or aspect, development of identity, and change of membership (Oshita, Okibayashi 2011). In this paper, based on this theory, we understand learning as participation and think J-CaJa as one of community of practice. In J-CaJa, the members change every year when new members participate from peripheral participation, an initial stage.

Research Question (RQ)

The purpose of this research is to learn how the Short Visit (SV) program affects students from the perspective of legitimate peripheral participation (LPP).

Setting for this RQ

The SV program is the main factor of J-CaJa, one of several international collaborative projects. However, it is not clear how it affects learners especially from viewpoint of LPP. It is important to clarify the impact of this SV program.

Research methodology

Data collection

To gather data, we conducted an unstructured interview with one member of J-CaJa.

Appropriateness of research object

The interviewee is one who joined J-CaJa last March and she participated in the SV program twice (SV1, and SV2). In comparison to one year before, her degree of participation obviously increased. Because of these two factors, it is easy to notice factors for her learning.

Data analysis

To analyze the data, we used this procedure:

1. Made a phonetic transcription of the interview.
2. Named each content unit.
3. Categorized each using similar names.
4. Identified factors that affected the learner's degree of participation.

Result

1. Utilized 121 names for the content units.
2. Established 26 categories from all the names
3. Identified 6 SV program factors that affected learning.

Conclusion

1. At the initial stage of participation, SV program prompts the learner to participate.
 - Awareness of a gap between image and reality of Cambodia.
 - Encouragement of understanding of discussion in group interaction.
 - Deepening the relationship among other members of J-CaJa
2. At the second stage of participation, SV program is considered a place to practice, and provides various feedbacks to the participant.
 - Feeling of responsibility
 - Lack of consideration of proposal
 - Importance of relationship between collaborators

Discussion

1. The number of interviewees is too small to validate the result. Moreover, there is a possibility that the content of the SV program affected the differences between first and second SV program. To clarify the relationship between SV programs and degree of participation, more interviewees, who joined SV2 program for the first time, are needed.
2. Learning needs to be clarified when learners participate in project activities domestically in order to compare the differences between learning in the SV program.

Conclusion

We clarified how the SV program affected the learner of J-CaJa. The impact was different depending on the learner's degree of participation.

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