



Title of Report: Teacher Training for New Hires at the Instituto Guatemalteco Americano

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1. Identify and describe the Professional Development Opportunity (PDO).

The PDO described in this case study is an online teacher-training program. The Instituto Guatemalteco Americano-IGA, a bi-national center in Guatemala, requires newly hired teachers to complete a training program, which establishes weekly meetings with a trainer. The trainer provides guidance on lesson planning, assigns teaching related tasks, teaches aspects of methods and techniques, and observes the teacher. The program is designed to provide training for in-service teachers working in distant places and teachers who are unable to attend weekly one-to-one training sessions.

The program was developed by IGA's Academic Department, which includes a group of nine trainers who are experienced trainers and have a formal background in teaching EFL and teacher training. These trainers are Adjunct Faculty members of SIT's Graduate Institute, university professors, and other professionals who have completed SIT's TESOL Certificate Course. The IGA program combines teleconferences and other online work done through a Moodle platform. It was first offered in January 2011, specifically for the IGA Cobán site, which is located in the Verapaz region, three hours away from IGA's headquarters. The program has a three-month duration, with teachers working on one module per week.

2. Describe the target audience of the PDO.

Participants in this PDO are newly hired teachers who will be working across different programs teaching EFL to children, teens, and adults. Teachers are usually proficient speakers of the English language who are selected primarily because of this expertise, but they may have some or no teaching experience. Individuals who have graduated from university teaching programs are few because there is a scarcity of such training programs in Guatemala, prospective teachers often lack the economic resources to attend a training program, or the training program is too distant for them to attend. Training sessions take place via videoconference with a group of seven teachers at a time, ranging in age from 19 to 55. Teachers participate from the cities of Cobán and Guatemala City.

3. Describe how students are recruited for the PDO.

Participants are recruited through the administrative procedures of the institution. One week after being hired, the Academic Department notifies all new teachers of their trainer assignment, times, and days. Teachers unable to attend face-to-face (ftf) training contact the Academic Department to arrange for online training. In the case of Cobán, teachers must

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agree on a time and day for their conferencing to take place as a group. Since the beginning of the program an average of nine teachers has been enrolled at any one time. At the time of writing, eleven teachers are enrolled.

4. Describe the curriculum choices made.

Online delivery was chosen for three main reasons. The first reason is to allow teachers from distant sites, such as Cobán, to have an on-going training program. Due to logistics and other personal reasons, it has not been possible to establish an on-site staff trainer in Cobán. However, the need to keep training standard is seen as of utmost importance in order to guarantee the same quality of teaching in all of the IGA sites. Secondly, a great number of teachers at IGA's main site are assigned to teach on weekends and are unable to attend ftf sessions due to other work or study commitments. These teachers consider the online program as an alternative way to get training at their convenience. The third reason for choosing an online program responds to IGA's strategic goal of moving into the use of the latest technology and web 2.0 tools for learning purposes, including the training of its teachers. This goal was established in 2008, starting with a plan to furnish all classrooms with interactive whiteboards.

The training program was developed four years ago by a team of teacher trainers for a ftf initial training sequence. These Academic Department trainers have a minimum experience of seven years in teacher training, with experience in teacher education in local universities and abroad. Some of the trainers are licensed to deliver SIT's TESOL Certificate Course, having participated in training programs in Ecuador, Costa Rica, the U.S., the U.K., and South Korea.

Although the program is largely based on the existing ftf sequence, it differs in two ways. The online program works with groups of seven or fewer teachers at a time or per session, whereas the ftf program conducted at the main Guatemala City site is one-to-one. The other difference is the frequency of observations conducted by the trainer to assess the teacher's development and needs. The suggested frequency in the ftf program is two observations per trimester, whereas the online training is once per trimester, and is conducted by a visit to the site or by filming the lesson.

5. Explain the PDO's over-arching goal and specific objectives.

The over-arching objective of the PDO is to provide new in-service staff members with the methods and techniques for the development of effective teaching and learning. The goals are to:

- (1) provide teachers with principles to be used in the decision-making process when planning, delivering, and reflecting on their lessons;
- (2) provide teachers with language teaching frameworks to be used in planning receptive or productive skills-focused lessons;
- (3) allow participants to experiment with different teaching techniques and methods with the purpose of developing a teaching approach suitable for their students;
- (4) raise teachers' awareness of important classroom issues such as management, the role of the teacher, or the role of the student;
- (5) allow teachers to make connections between theory and classroom practice;

- (6) open a forum for reflection and discussion that will foster a teacher's professional development; and
- (7) provide new teachers with guidance on lesson planning, with the aim of developing a critical approach to lesson planning.

6. Describe the teaching and learning activities used in the PDO and what online applications are used to support these activities.

The program includes three main components as follows:

- (1) Moodle platform (asynchronous): Handouts, task sheets, and readings are placed on this platform. Participants access the material and download it according to the session assigned for that week.
- (2) Video conferencing (synchronous): Each week, a teacher trainer conducts a video conference with groups of participants in order to address specific topics, discuss materials that participants have downloaded, and share the results of the tasks that were assigned. This session can also provide participants with methodological input.
- (3) Participant forum (asynchronous): The platform includes an option that allows participants to engage in conversation about teaching issues with their colleagues, which might include sharing practices, providing ideas, and comparing experiences.

7. Describe how the PDO helps students understand the local context in which they are studying so that they can work together with other students in the global context of your online PDO.

The majority of teachers in the program are currently working in IGA Cobán. The rest of the participants are teachers working in IGA Guatemala City. These contexts are different. The tasks that are given online to participants allow them to focus specifically on their own contexts. One of the main objectives has been to help teachers develop applications and solutions that will work best for their learners and their place of work. Therefore, the program encourages participants to develop an understanding of their local contexts.

Understanding of a global context occurs in the asynchronous forum, where participants are given a chance to critically discuss the teaching issues common to both Cobán and Guatemala City. Participants also have a chance to share materials they have found useful with colleagues from the other site. Although the training is conducted in-country for teachers (both Guatemalan nationals and foreigners) who will teach in Guatemala, these locally based teachers are exposed to the global field of TESOL in the program.

8. Describe how the PDO helps students prepare for the local context in which they will work.

The PDO's materials and instruction focus on the learner and on ways in which the learner's needs must dictate decision-making for the teacher. Thus, it is inevitable that the teacher must consider the context. Participants are required to develop ideas and apply techniques and principles that take into account such contextual aspects as culture, socioeconomic background, and life-shaping possibilities. The video sessions also allow

participants to ask questions and share conclusions regarding issues that are particular to their teaching contexts.

9. Explain the characteristics of the teacher educator(s) working in the PDO.

The professor who has been conducting the training has a teaching degree and over fifteen years of experience in teacher training. She is also a staff professor for the English Teaching Program at a local university. In order to work with the online program, the professor received training in the use of Moodle and Skype. This training was for ten hours of instruction. Additionally, a member of the institution's IT Department provides on-going and on-the-spot support.

10. Describe the non-teaching staff.

The non-teaching support staff includes the IT technician, the Digital Resources Coordinator, and the Academic Director. The IT technician is in charge of providing immediate solutions for problems that may arise, which include poor connections, audio difficulties, and visual problems. The Digital Resources Coordinator contributes to the program by administering the IGA Teaching Platform and finding ways to maximize its use. The Academic Director's role is to verify that the goals of both the program and the teachers involved are being met. Surveying the participants and communicating with the Site Director are two ways in which the program's effectiveness is assessed.

11. Explain the learning assessments used in the PDO.

The program contains twelve segments on key aspects of teaching. At the end of each segment, participants are given a task, which they must carry out and upload to the platform. These tasks are essential tools for assessing the participants' progress. Tasks include designing activities, planning lessons, creating flipcharts, and writing comments on the forum. Additionally, the teachers' progress is assessed through classroom observation. Exit requirements are successful completion of the tasks and application of pedagogic principles in their lesson delivery.

12. Explain the mechanism used to evaluate the PDO.

The PDO has been evaluated by a review from the Cobán Site Director and the Academic Director. At the time of writing, a user survey is being developed for participants in order to provide an assessment of the program.

13. Describe the challenges involved in offering this PDO online.

The program has encountered many challenges, which can be divided into technical aspects, scheduling details, and technology availability. Technical difficulties have been found in aspects such as connection speed. Due to the infrastructure in the region, some sessions have experienced loss of connection or a lack of ability to stream videos or teleconferences. These problems have sometimes forced the trainer to finish the session or use sound-only options. The scheduling challenge is the difficulty of establishing a time when all teachers can be together for the videoconference sessions. Most teachers have other jobs in addition to their IGA ones, which makes setting a meeting time for the entire group a challenge. For this reason, two schedules have been established. There are also technology



availability challenges. Some teachers do not have personal access to computers so that they can work on the Moodle Platform; some may not have the required computer skills to do so. For these reasons, training on using Moodle has been provided, along with permission for participants to access computers at the IGA sites.

14. Describe the success of the PDO and how they are documented.

The success of the course has been documented through interviews with participants. These interviews have been mainly focused on participants' success in implementing newly learned teaching principles and techniques in their classrooms. Additionally, lessons have been filmed to provide an evaluation of the teachers' progress in applying what they have learned from the program. Further work still needs to be done in this regard, which must include a teacher and student survey.