Remote Training Program for Preservation and Conservation Provided by the National Diet Library

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1. Introduction

We have been annually conducting at the National Diet Library (NDL) a group training program called the Preservation and Conservation Training Program intended for all librarians in Japan. The NDL also dispatches its staff members as lecturers for training courses in response to requests from libraries in Japan and overseas. We accept trainees at the request of libraries in Japan and from abroad. In addition, there is a program on preservation and conservation in the curriculum of the training for the staff of Branch Libraries of the NDL in the executive and judicial agencies.

We started a remote training program covering the theory of preservation as well as restoration techniques, titled “Basic idea of preservation and conservation”, in 2006 in addition to the above-mentioned various opportunities for training.

The NDL currently provides five courses in the remote training program: the digitization of materials, rare and old materials, science and technology information (introduction), science and technology information (reports produced under grants-in-aid for scientific research, doctoral dissertations and standards), and the preservation and conservation, which was the first to be developed. One of the reasons was that the NDL had accumulated training know-how through the group training program. Another reason was that we identified various issues in preservation and conservation through the program, and were aware that there was a need for training in the field. We, as a national library and the IFLA PAC Regional Centre for Asia, realized that it was necessary to meet the needs of training for preservation and conservation in Japan and we had a responsibility to provide the opportunity for such training without any time, spatial or budgetary constraints. We learned that although the results of the after-program evaluation are favorable, the one-day training course is not enough to conduct the actual work of preservation and conservation. Thus we started to shape a remote training program. It was the first of such attempts by the NDL. It took about three years from concept to launch, and about the half of the time was taken for the development work.

2. Creation

2.1 Creation and manpower

In creating the remote training program for preservation and conservation, the Preservation Division of the Acquisitions Department (now Acquisitions and Bibliography Department) in the Tokyo Main Library took charge of developing the content of course materials, and the Library Support Division in the Kansai-kan handled the project management. Plural-duty officers for preservation and conservation, who are not from the Preservation Division and serving concurrently for the work of the Preservation Division including research and study on preservation and conservation, also joined to develop the content of course materials. Information about how to preserve photos and microforms was commissioned to outside experts.

Before developing course materials on restoration work, it was necessary for the staff of the Preservation Division to initially review and standardize the terms and methods used in their daily restoration work. It was discussed among staff members in the Preservation Division, and fortunately, the discussion had already been in progress prior to the creation of the remote training program. In the final stage of the creation of course materials, the whole documents had to be checked to make it easy-to-understand. The checking was outsourced.

It was important to coordinate the project by involving the Preservation Division, the Library Support Division and the outside, and continue the work in a mutually-supportive way.

2.2 Policy for developing course materials

The course materials were developed under the following policy:
• The training should be at a basic level to learn the fundamental knowledge of preservation and conservation.
• The training is not intended to produce technical experts, but is aimed at general librarians.
• The training focuses on measures which are necessary and feasible for all libraries regardless of their type.
• The training emphasizes the importance of prevention rather than restoration, and of management rather than technique.
• The training uses course materials in Japanese, but their contents should have a global commonality.
• The remote training program “Basic idea of preservation and conservation” covers the basic content of general preservation and conservation, and the group training program “Preservation and Conservation Training Program” features repair and restoration.

2.3 Content of course materials

Based on the above policy, the training opens with an explanation of the necessity of preservation and conservation of materials, and makes trainees learn the appropriate environment and measures for preservation. The table of contents of each chapter, the objectives and contents and the average time needed for learning are as follows.
Chapter I. Introduction: Basic viewpoint of preservation and conservation
Section 1. Basic idea of preservation and conservation
Section 2. Main causes of material deterioration
Section 3. History of preservation and conservation

Learning objective: Learn the basic viewpoint and idea of preservation and conservation
Average time for learning: 90 min

Chapter II. Storage environment and conservation measures
Section 1. Preservation environment
Section 2. Security and disaster prevention
Section 3. Preservation measures for printed materials – Part 1. Protection and handling
Section 4. Preservation measures for paper materials – Part 2. Media conversion
Section 5. Preservation measures for photos and microfilms
Section 6. Preservation measures for audiovisual materials

Learning objective: Learn the concept of appropriate storage and use including causes of material deterioration and storage environment, and measures for preservation
Average time for learning: 330 min

Chapter III. Idea of preservation and management, and methodology
Section 1. Preservation and management
Section 2. Research for preservation and conservation
Section 3. Development, implementation and evaluation of preservation plans
Section 4. Preservation cooperation activities

Learning objective: Learn the methodology of implementing the basic idea of preservation and conservation and preservation measures learnt in Chapters I and II, in a systematic and organized way
Average time for learning: 90 min

Comprehension test
20 questions from Chapters I, II and III to check the trainees’ understanding

Supplemental course materials: “Making of preservation container”, “Quick repair”, “Binding of Japanese-style books” and “Materials and equipment”

2.4 Technology of the system used and standards

As regards the Learning Management System (LMS), the existing system named “Learning Station” has been adopted, and course materials prepared in accordance with SCORM1.2 standard have been loaded. The SCORM is a standard for ensuring the interoperability of the learning systems and contents of e-learning. Therefore, if it becomes necessary to change to other LMS, we can load the standard-compliant course materials onto the new LMS and operate for a long time without major renovation.

The contract with the vendor for the initial system terminated in February 2010 and we conducted the replacement aiming at release in February 2010 (April 2010-March 2011). The greatest change brought about by the replacement is to provide using SaaS (short for Software as a Service) which means we purchase only services from a vendor. We had installed necessary devices such as servers inside the library to provide the LMS, but we can now provide at a low price without reducing the service level. Accordingly, the current LMS is to be modified and specifications of the screen are also to be greatly changed. The screen has become much easier for trainees to understand visually and to operate from April 2010.

Fig. 1. In this screen the causes of paper deterioration, air oxidation and acidity, are described. (Section 2 of Chapter I: Main causes of materials deterioration)

3. Operation and State of Implementation

3.1 Operation

The term of training is three to four months. One can apply for the course through an application form at the NDL website. After confirming that the applicant is indeed a librarian, we issue an ID and a password to access the LMS.

Instruction messages given by the LMS are visual and auditory; it is said that the combination of both elements magnifies learning efficacy. Questions are accepted by the Library Support Division via e-mail and answers are prepared by the Preservation Division, and are in turn transmitted by the former. We send e-mails of encouragement during the period of training, to keep trainees motivated. After a trainee completes all the curricula and scores 80 out of 100 on the last examination, a certificate is sent from the Library Support Division in PDF format.
3.2 State of Implementation

We have held the “Basic idea of preservation and conservation” course five times (twice in 2006) from June 1, 2006 to February 2009, reaching capacity every time. The number of trainees was 435 (181 in the 1st term and 254 in the 2nd) in February 2006, 201 in February 2007, 200 in February 2008 and 150 in February 2009. The type of participating librarians varies. Although the course materials are provided in Japanese, we saw the participation of Japanese studies librarians from abroad rise; 2 in 2006, 7 in 2007, 9 in 2008 and 10 in 2009.

We launched an English web page “Training Programs for Librarians” (http://www.ndl.go.jp/en/library/training_programs.html) and call upon anyone interested in “Basic idea of preservation and conservation” to refer to it.

Additionally, as a part of MLA (Museum, Library and Archive) collaboration, we will pilot the participation of staff from museums and archives from April 2010. Long has the NDL learned from museums and archives on preservation, it is now the time to give out our training in return.

4. Reception

Trainees are asked to answer questionnaires on a voluntary basis. The response is highly favorable, many trainees commenting that their attitude towards preservation had changed and that the training had been practical.

We received numerous opinions and requests, “too many course materials” prominently among them. We had been well aware from the beginning of the possible burden imposed by course materials for trainees. However, in view of our objective to provide a comprehensive training package on preservation from basic idea to practice, we decided that it is unavoidable.

Concerning the system, many trainees pointed out that it would have been much more helpful if the images, especially of repairing and making a preservation container, had been animated. The system allows trainees to download course materials as well as to use them online. However, as both materials are viewable in the same format, some trainees commented that they would like the usability of downloaded materials to be improved.

5. Achievements and Further Challenges

The remote training program “Basic idea of preservation and conservation” has been implemented 5 times since 2006 and 986 trainees have completed the training. It has had a largely favorable reception.

Progress has been made but challenges remain. We have not sufficiently caught up with the developments in the field of preservation. Digitization of information is ever on the march and it is already mainstream to digitize materials to preserve them. We need to revise our course materials accordingly.

In the case of the group training program, we often receive thanks for giving direct, detailed guidance for repair work. We need to offer more comprehensible, usable course materials for the remote training program as well. As pointed out in the questionnaires, room for improvement remains, such as employing moving images and making downloaded materials more easily viewable.

As for the operational framework, it is necessary to provide better support for recipients of e-learning. Trainees frequently inquire about the system and ask for reissue of IDs and passwords. We need enough manpower to cope with questions and requests, and it is advisable to equip the system with the function to reissue IDs and passwords to save labor.

In other words, we need to renovate the system of the remote training program, revising course materials and making LMS more flexible, which in turn requires rearrangement of the internal operation at the NDL.

This article describes the NDL remote training program on preservation as concretely as possible. There is international common ground as well as regional differences, according to weather and paper quality, in the field of preservation. Nevertheless, I do hope that our experience will be of some use to libraries planning to develop remote training programs of their own.