

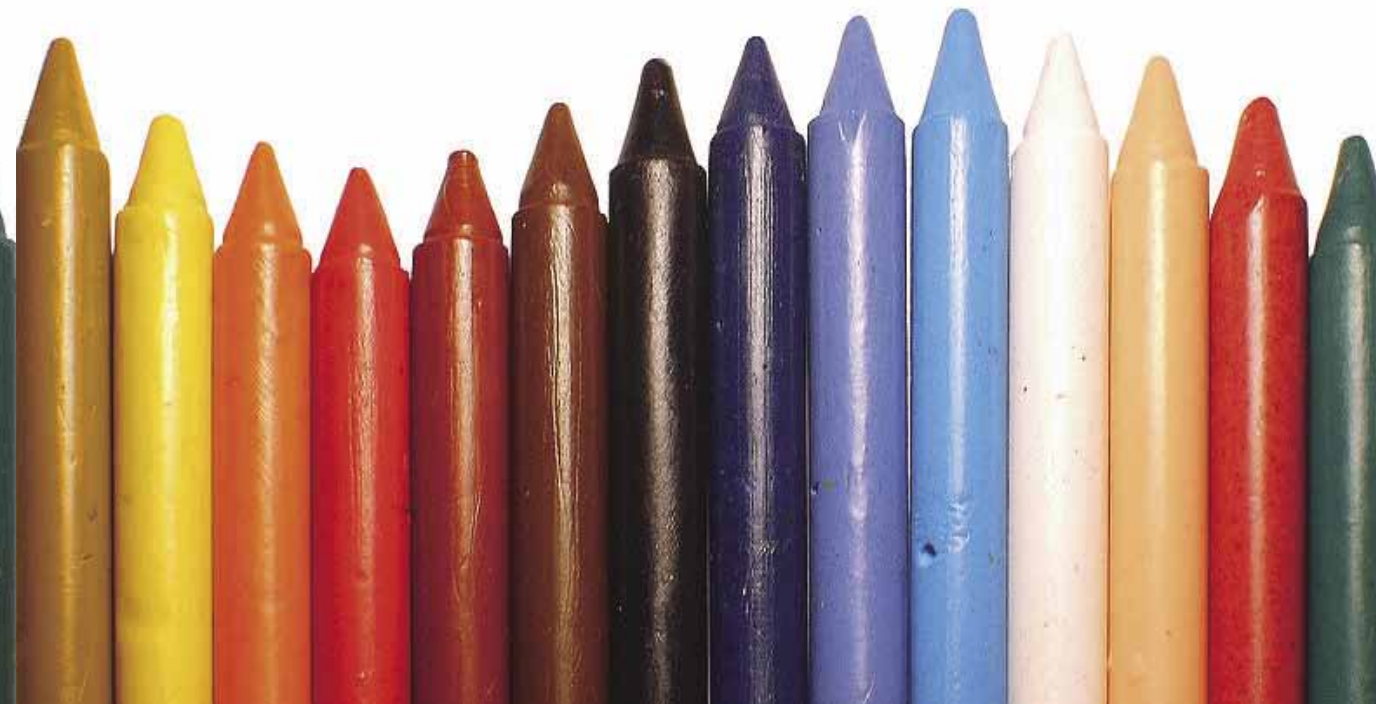
ALT

ハンドブック

Assistant Language Teacher



Handbook



ALT HANDBOOK

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Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of the *ALT Handbook* is to provide information to JET participants regarding teaching in Japan and how to adapt to one's workplace.

Resources

This handbook and the complementary *Teaching Materials Collection* are compilations of information collected from participants of the former British English Teachers Scheme (BETS) and the Monbusho English Fellows (MEF) Programme, as well as past and current JET participants.

Previously known as the *Resource Materials and Teaching Handbook*, this handbook was split in two and the *Teaching Materials Collection* is now provided in an online format. A PDF version of the *ALT Handbook* is also available on the JET Programme website at: www.jetprogramme.org/e/current/publications.html

CLAIR would like to express special thanks to all of the JET participants and JET alumni who submitted new material for the 2013 edition of the handbook. This edition contains extensive new content, and we hope that ALTs will find it useful.

Please also utilize our Teaching Materials Exchange Forum where JET participants are able to share their teaching materials with the JET community: www.jetprogramme.org/forums

Limited Distribution

This handbook is published with funds specifically earmarked for JET participants. Although your teachers or co-workers may wish for a copy, CLAIR is unable to send copies to non-JET participants. Our print-run does not allow for sending extra copies to JET participants. If you need an extra copy, please download the PDF format from our website (www.jetprogramme.org). Thank you for your understanding.

Finally

We hope that you find this handbook and the complementary online materials useful. If you have any suggestions for improvement, including content you would like to add or lesson ideas to submit, please visit our forums (www.jetprogramme.org/forums) or contact us directly at jet@clair.or.jp.

The Editors

Commonly used expressions, abbreviations and Japanese vocabulary

Titles and Institutions

| | |
|--------------|--|
| JET | - Japan Exchange and Teaching |
| ALT | - Assistant Language Teacher |
| CIR | - Coordinator for International Relations |
| SEA | - Sports Exchange Advisor |
| CLAIR | - Council of Local Authorities for International Relations |
| MIC | - Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications |
| MOFA | - Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| MEXT | - Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology |
| BETS | - British English Teacher Scheme (British forerunner to the JET Programme) |
| MEF | - Monbusho English Fellow (American forerunner to the JET Programme) |
| EFL | - English as a Foreign Language |
| ESL | - English as a Second Language |
| ESS | - English Speaking Society |
| ES | - Elementary School |
| JHS | - Junior High School |
| SHS | - Senior High School |
| JTE | - Japanese Teacher of English |
| TEFL | - Teaching English as a Foreign Language |
| TESL | - Teaching English as a Second Language |
| TT | - Team teaching |

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| somusho | - Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC) |
| gaimusho | - Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) |
| monbukagakusho | - Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) |
| kencho | - Prefectural Government Office |
| kyoiku-iinkai | - Board of Education |
| shiyakusho | - City Hall |
| yakuba | - Town Hall |

School Related

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| bukatsu | - extracurricular/after school activities |
| byokyu | - sick leave (paid) |
| chugakko | - junior high school |
| daigaku | - university |
| daikyu | - compensatory holiday |
| eigo | - English |
| eikaiwa | - English conversation |
| ichinensei | - first year |
| kocho sensei | - headmaster/principal |
| koko | - senior high school |
| kyoto sensei | - deputy head/vice-principal |
| kyushoku | - school lunch |

| | |
|------------------|---|
| nenkyu | - annual paid holiday |
| nihongo | - Japanese language |
| ninensei | - second year |
| sannensei | - third year |
| seito | - students |
| sempai | - elder, senior, mentor |
| sensei | - teacher; form of address for teachers |
| shogakko | - primary/elementary school |
| yasumi | - holiday, rest, break, day off |
| yochien | - kindergarten |
| zangyo | - overtime |

Work-Related

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| bonenkai | - end of year party |
| enkai | - party |
| gaman | - patience, tolerance, perseverance |
| giri | - obligation |
| honne | - real intention, true feelings |
| kangeikai | - welcome party |
| nijikai | - party following the <i>enkai</i> |
| omiyage | - souvenir gift(s) |
| shinnenkai | - New Year party |
| sobetsukai | - farewell party |
| tatemaie | - saying and doing what is expected |

Other Commonly Used Vocabulary

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| bento | - packed (boxed) lunch |
| genki | - well-being, energetic |
| gambatte | - do your best (command) |
| daijobu | - okay, no problem |
| dame | - no good, not acceptable |
| dozo | - help yourself, go ahead |
| gaikokujin | - foreigner |
| hiragana | - Japanese syllabary |
| inaka | - rural area(s) |
| kokusaika | - internationalisation |
| kanji | - Chinese characters |
| katakana | - Japanese syllabary used for foreign words |
| katakana eigo | - Japanised pronunciation of English |
| meishi | - business cards |
| romaji | - Romanisation of Japanese |

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The Workplace

Life After the B.O.E.

BY DAVID NAMISATO (AOMORI-KEN CIR, 2002-04)



**Don't worry.
They'll stop calling you by your
predecessor's name in a month or two.**

CONTRACTING ORGANISATIONS

All JET participants are appointed by a contracting organisation. JET participants are not employed by the JET Programme, CLAIR, or the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). The contracting organisation is responsible for the JET participant's working life. It is very important that you know who your contracting organisation supervisor is so that if you have any problems or queries, you can address your concerns to the correct person. As an ALT your contracting organisation will be one of the following:

A Prefectural/Designated City Board of Education

Some ALTs are employed by the board of education in the host prefecture or designated city in which they are placed. ALTs are placed in either schools or regional education offices in the jurisdiction of their contracting organisation. There is typically a person in charge of ALTs in the main office located in the prefectural office. If you are a prefectural ALT, the desk from which you work could be placed in an office or school quite far away from your contracting organisation (the board of education), and it is possible that you have little or no direct contact with them. In this case, you will be assigned a local supervisor either at a school, or at the local branch of the prefectural board of education.

A City, Town or Village

Some ALTs are employed by local municipalities. They are usually placed in a regional board of education or a school, but their contracting organisation is the town, city or village itself. If you are such an ALT you could well be the only JET participant your contracting organisation employs, especially if you are in a rural area. Your supervisor, who may or may not be a teacher, is the one who will be responsible for you, and policies regarding the JET participant will be determined by local officials. Municipal ALTs often work in numerous schools, and may be asked to become involved in other educational or international exchange projects organised by their contracting organisations.

A Private School

Some ALTs are employed by private schools. If your contracting organisation is a private school, you will probably be based in one school with no other school visits. Your supervisor will probably be based in the school you are in and will be able to liaise directly between you and your policy-makers, the school officials.

Whichever your contracting organisation is, make sure you know to whom you should address your questions and what everyone's role is.

WORK RELATIONS

First Impressions

Making a good first impression is very important in Japanese society. The best way to achieve this at your workplace is to be as conservative as possible for the first few weeks, no matter how hot and humid it is. Wearing a suit, having a well kept hairstyle, wearing a minimal amount of jewelry and makeup, removing facial piercings, keeping perfume/cologne to a bare minimum, and covering up tattoos are some of the best ways to do this. Men may also want to inquire about the facial hair policy.

On your first day in any school you should familiarise yourself with the key staff members. Those placed higher-up, such as the principal and vice-principal, may not speak any English so you would be well advised to memorise a simple self-introduction in Japanese. The following is one example. If in any doubt, ask your supervisor for advice or assistance with pronunciation.

- Bow: Back straight, hands at sides for men and in front for women.
The lower the bow, the more polite.
- Say: *Hajimemashite* ("Pleased to meet you.")
- Say: Your name + *desu* ("My name is")
- Say: *Dozo yoroshiku onegai shimasu.* ("I'm looking forward to working with you.")
- Bow again

Be prepared to say this to the principal (*kocho sensei*), vice-principal (*kyoto sensei*), possibly the office superintendent (*jimuchō*) and any people you are introduced to. Doing your self-introduction in Japanese (no matter how short or how awkward you might think it is) will certainly impress your co-workers. Making an effort to learn and use the Japanese language will show that you are serious about becoming a part of your host environment. Also, using polite suffixes after the family names of those you interact with (Ex: Tanaka-san, Yamada-sensei, etc.) and calling your superiors by their work titles will show you are courteous and respectful. Your new colleagues will appreciate any effort you make to speak Japanese, no matter what their English ability may be. However, if you forget the introduction you memorised, do not worry. A smile and a pleasant manner will also be appreciated.

Many staff members in your new workplace may feel shy and insecure about talking to you straight away. If you have any cookies or other edible gift from your home country you could ask your supervisor how to go about distributing them and this could help break the ice. It can take time to establish friendly relations with your workmates and this is sometimes a surprise for ALTs who are not used to Japanese styles of communication. Be patient and always try to be friendly and approachable. First impressions endure in Japan so remember that you are laying important groundwork for the year ahead.

Maintaining a Good Rapport

Your relationship with your contracting organisation is at the core of being successful on the JET Programme, and it is important that you develop a good, trusting relationship with your co-workers. Your contracting organisation is the place that appoints you, so building their trust will not only help in the smooth running of your everyday worklife, it could also prove to have other benefits. If you ever have a problem or are in an emergency, you will find that the kind of extra support or sympathy you receive from your colleagues could depend on the little things you do in the workplace every day. It is important to remember that, as a professional, your manners as well as how you conduct yourself will determine your relationships with the Japanese people around you (co-workers, neighbours, etc.). Regardless of what terms your predecessor and such people may have been on, earning their respect and recognition is something you will have to do on your own. A few weeks after having made your first impression on your colleagues, you will begin to have a better sense of how much you can relax, while still following the unspoken rules that exist at the workplace. The following are some things you should bear in mind when you are at work.

- Be punctual. Timeliness is highly valued in Japanese society. Find out when you are expected to be at work and arrange to arrive a little earlier at all times. It will help build the image of a responsible, reliable, and professional individual.

- Dress appropriately. Appearance matters, so try to ascertain what kind of dress is expected of you. You would probably be better off avoiding anything too casual or unconventional. Once you understand what the acceptable dress code for work is (business suits are usually the norm in academic schools and offices; black suits are the norm for school ceremonies) you may be able to modify your initial style to something less formal. But always pay attention to your attire and continue to hide tattoos, unnecessary piercings, and to keep jewelry to a minimum, as these often are school rules. When in doubt, ask one of your colleagues.

- Greet people in the mornings. When the staff arrive in the morning you will hear a loud chorus of *ohayo gozaimasu* (good morning) in the office. Lose your inhibitions and shout it out with a smile when you yourself arrive in the office.

- Be conscious of your body language and facial expressions. For example, yawning, putting your hands in your pockets, or moving things with your feet are all considered rude. Gestures may have completely different meanings in Japan. Overtly conveying negative emotions through facial and/or physical expression (no matter how subtle) is poorly received, as this is seen as childish and immature. On the contrary, a cheerful but calm and cooperative demeanour is always well received. Smile and be enthusiastic. This will automatically make you more approachable.

- Ask for permission to do anything, especially at first. More responsibility will be entrusted to you as time goes on. If you ask permission for something make sure you speak to the appropriate person, that is the person immediately above you, or start with your supervisor. Going above someone's head, even if it is to approach someone in a better position to help you, is considered an insult to those in charge.

- Show interest in your work and accept any offers that come your way. Your colleagues will be impressed by your openness and willingness to learn and be part of the team. Offer to do simple tasks to help other staff members. They may not be within your responsibility, but they have to be done and your help will be appreciated. It is also a good way to initiate communication and build camaraderie and trust.

- Study Japanese and show a willingness to learn about Japanese culture. Your efforts will be appreciated and your colleagues are likely to be more open to accepting you as someone who is trying to become part of the school environment. Check with your supervisor first to see if it is acceptable to study Japanese during work hours.

- Enjoy being with your students. Showing a genuine interest in them will not only endear yourself to them, it will also impress the other teachers, who will be happy to see you care about the school.

- Appreciate the fact that some of the teachers can be very busy and it is not always appropriate to talk to them. If it is not urgent, wait and try to judge when they have more time on their hands. Do not be too overbearing - some staff members may be feeling shy and will only approach you once they have warmed up to you.

- When going on a business trip or taking holidays, it is customary to bring back *omiyage*, a souvenir for the staff members to share (nearly always food of some sort.) There are shops in every airport and big train station selling boxes of local sweets for this purpose. You do not have to buy souvenirs for every trip you make, and you are also certainly not expected to spend a lot of money on these souvenirs.

- You should never feel pressured to accept something that you are not comfortable with. Making a little effort everyday, however, will probably pay dividends in the long run. Things may be going smoothly now, but the moment something crops up and you want your voice to be heard, you will find that you will be taken much more seriously if your colleagues know that you are a serious and professional worker who has a genuine interest in and willingness to adapt to your work environment.

FINDING YOUR WAY AROUND SCHOOL

No matter where your office is, as an ALT you will be spending a lot of time in schools. If you have any questions you should feel free to ask your supervisor or the teachers you are working with for assistance. Teachers, however, are often very busy and you may like to spend a little time on your own trying to find out how the workplace is run. The best way to do this is by simple observation, and asking questions when appropriate. Remember that especially at first you are a new staff member, so be sure that you do not tread on your colleagues' toes too much. The following are things that you might want to look for in your schools:

Staffroom Blackboard

In most schools there is a blackboard in the staffroom which shows the schedule for that day, the following day, and the month. This gets updated regularly and shows any changes in the timetable for each class, any special events and details such as changes in the timing or length of each period, extra cleaning time, and school assemblies. In the beginning, your supervisor will probably tell you this information, but you should learn to decipher the schedules written on the blackboard. Most of it will be written in Japanese, but you should be able to get an idea of what is normal and what is not. If the blackboard suddenly has lots of writing on it or anything written in large characters, it would probably be a good idea to ask if there is anything special going on. You may also be able to check whether any of your classes have been rescheduled.

Telephones/Copy Machine/Computer

It will depend on school policy whether or not you can make phone calls freely. When you first arrive you should always ask permission. As a rule you should never make personal phone calls or send personal faxes from the school, and if you receive an incoming call you should try to keep it as short as possible. Talking away on the phone, in what is for your colleagues a foreign language, could cause resentment. However, as calls to your PA or CLAIR are considered to be work-related, your contracting organisation should allow you to call if and when necessary. The same principle applies to using the computer. Limit your use to short periods of time and to work related activities. As a general rule, using the computer for personal use is inappropriate.

Photocopier

You should similarly limit your use of the school photocopier strictly to work-related material. Some schools do not allow teachers to use them freely. As with everything else, you should ask your supervisor first about the protocol. Most schools have a normal white-paper machine and another machine which prints out a large number of copies in a short time on recycled paper for student and general use.

Trial Textbooks

Salespeople often come to schools to promote various textbooks and teaching materials, and they often leave samples for the teachers. These sometimes end up in bookcases around the staffroom and can be a valuable resource for ALTs. You may find ideas in the oral communication textbooks or graphics to adapt for your own activities.

TEACHING AT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Hal Edmonson (Aomori Prefecture, 2009-)

In a departure from manual etiquette, be assured of one thing: working as an elementary school ALT in Japan *is*, in fact, all fun and games. That is the express purpose. No homework, no drill books, no exams, not even a grade to put on a refrigerator. Instead, elementary school teaching is all about setting the stage for lifelong language learning, allowing children the chance to fall in love with English long before it becomes a requirement. That is not to say that teaching elementary school does not require work. It does, and quite a bit in order to maximise the time spent with young learners. Conceived broadly, however, elementary schools have offered many ALTs unparalleled creativity, and a chance to have an early, lasting influence upon students and schools alike.

Foreign Language Activities and ALTs

Officially speaking, the mandatory curriculum for fifth and sixth year students is known as “Foreign Language Activities (FLA)”. Few will bat an eye if you call it “English Class”, but the distinction is not merely semantic. Academic grammar instruction and vocabulary building are not on the menu here, nor is any standardised assessment. If students pick up some proficiency, that is a nice bonus, but the

goal is *exposing* students to English, letting them explore it like a playground and try its rhythms and sounds on for size.

To that end, MEXT has approved an activity book series—currently known as “Hi, Friends!”—that takes students on a guided tour of sorts through some basic English communication. The textbooks are organised thematically, but the activities contained are not always cumulative, and sometimes are not geared toward a measurable objective. While a source of frustration for some teachers, this is by design. Moreover, it invites teachers to craft their own goals and projects, rearranging and adapting the textbook to suit their class’s needs.

One further distinguishing characteristic of the curriculum is its ability to be taught by a homeroom teacher (HRT) without a specialised English teacher or ALT present (there simply are not enough of them to go around). “Hi, Friends” is bundled with interactive software to bring the textbook to life through animations, dialogues, and quiz games to enable this.

At the fifth and sixth grade level, your role as an ALT is essentially to augment the activities in “Hi, Friends!” Your presence allows students to explore English with a native speaker—far more interesting than chanting at a screen! — and is a vivid demonstration of the practical applications of English. With an actual human being to interact with, the students have the chance to generate their own English content. You may also be asked to plan activities outside of the textbook or that relate your home country’s culture to the theme of the lesson. A classic example might be a Canadian ALT introducing the idea of a multi-lingual society, or an ALT from Australia pointing out how there are many dialects of English besides the widely known American variant.

In addition, many schools offer one-off lessons to first through fourth grade students as well. There is no textbook at this level, however, and schools do not have a firm quota of instructional hours to offer. For lower grades, it is fairly typical for ALTs to have *carte blanche* to plan and lead class, perhaps having been given a requested topic in advance. Games, songs, and holidays are staples of this level.

Team Teaching Balance

As with any JET teaching placement, ALTs are expected to work with and support the HRT in leading the class. Teaching at an elementary school, however, presents two unique pressures on this critical dynamic. In the first place, while the curriculum is set up to enable HRTs to conduct FLA, it bears mentioning that some— though *by no means all*—HRTs are uncomfortable with this arrangement. Leading an activity in a language that one may not speak is an unusual assignment, to say nothing of doing so alongside a native speaker (who may not speak Japanese). On the other hand, very few ALTs are based in elementary schools, making face-to-face communication and advance planning difficult at times. As a result, there are numerous stories of ALTs being left to their own devices in planning and leading elementary classes.

To some, this might seem nice, but I submit that there are few places where true team teaching is as essential as an elementary school classroom. Even if your HRT does not know English, they certainly *do* know their students, and they do know how to engage them. Planning together is the only way that your respective skill sets will really get combined, and can often lead to far more creative lessons than either of you could do solo. It can also be very inspiring for students to see their HRT getting into the act. A cultivated relationship with your HRT—not stickers, not the textbook—is the most essential tool in being an effective ALT. And, since elementary teachers are conveyors of culture and values to the very young, many HRTs have fascinating insights into Japanese culture that may illuminate so many hard-to-see corners of your experience in Japan.

Outside the Classroom

With their comparatively loose structure, and small student populations, elementary schools are overflowing with ways to be involved outside of class. No visit to an elementary school is complete without being mobbed by hordes of screaming six-year-olds and forcibly dragged outside to play tag, and the club activities after school would likely welcome your presence.

Cultural exchange can happen anywhere, however. As you get to know your school, you may begin to find ways to introduce international elements into standard school activities. ALTs in my area have volunteered to teach a recipe in Home Arts class, demonstrated a sport like Ultimate Frisbee in P.E, or even been a “special guest” during Social Studies classes concerning their home country. Others have led games during the Field Day or helped classes prepare English-themed acts for the School Concert. Becoming an integral part of a visit school will take time and energy, of course, but it will provide another setting to interact with students, and create a precedent for future involvement by yourself or your eventual successor. As the adage goes: you get out what you put in.

Final Thoughts

Elementary Schools are as close to a blank canvas as it gets for an ALT. The sometimes nebulous goals and methods invite you to work with other teachers to set goals and to put your own interests and experiences into the service of the students. Surely you will discover ideas that succeed, and others that do not, and that is OK- everything about elementary school teaching is still in the innovation stage, and experimentation is encouraged.

What is certain, however, is the importance of being fully present to both students and teachers. Every interaction that inspires a child to look up something on his or her own about your home country, or to consider his or her own culture from an outsider’s perspective, may plant a seed to study abroad or try yet another language ten years down the line. A well-crafted lesson may stick in the head of HRTs, who will carry those ideas to their next class, or their next school, and offer it to the next ALT with whom they teach. As a good friend reminded me on more than one occasion, the ‘E’ in JET stands not for “English”, but “Exchange”. If you look hard enough, it is likely that elementary school has a place for whatever you have to offer.

TEACHING AT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Rafael Villadiego (Nagasaki Prefecture, 2010-13)

Teaching at Junior High School (JHS) can be a challenging but ultimately rewarding experience. JHS is where you will likely find the most variation in students’ English language interest and ability as they progress through the grades. Partially due to where they are in their English language education and where they are developmentally.

JHS is where English first becomes an official subject- meaning students will be assessed and graded on their progress. Much of the grammar explanations are conducted by the Japanese Teacher of English (JTE) in Japanese, to ensure the students gain a firm grasp of the basic rules behind the language. But as the ALT, you will be heavily involved in creating the appropriate communicative environment, as well as designing and leading specific activities to help solidify and reinforce these ideas. Within the classroom, you will ideally use only English, as it is vital for students to gain as much exposure to the target language as possible, and they can usually understand basic instructions, as long as they are delivered simply, along with appropriate examples and gestures.

First year students (grade seven), fresh out of elementary school, are very active and full of excitement about English, as the focus of English language activities in elementary schools was to make the language accessible and fun, without the need for reading or writing acquisition or formal assessments. As such, you will find that the initial JHS curriculum and textbook is focussed on the foundations of the language- from reading and writing the alphabet, to basic grammar and sentence formation.

Second year students (grade eight) will have established the initial building blocks of the language and have basic communicative skills. However, this is also the point where students may lose their initial interest in English as it has become just another subject, with all the requisite homework and examinations. And as with any other subject (maths, science, etc.), there will be students who enjoy English and those who find it boring. So your role as an ALT is to keep the students as motivated and

involved as possible.

Third year students (grade nine) will be focussed on preparing for high school entrance exams- with English being one of the compulsory assessable subjects. So if you find that you are spending less time with your third year students towards the end of the academic year, please do not think of it as a slight. It is more than likely that your JTE will be focussed on drilling the requisite reading, writing, grammar and test-taking skills, rather than the communicative speaking and listening aspects for which ALTs are more involved.

However, in all the grade levels, it is important to remember that one of the fundamental aims of utilising team teaching is to promote inter-cultural collaboration, and both you and your JTE contribute different but equally vital expertise to the English language classroom. Work together to build a comfortable repartee and cooperative structure in order to provide a supportive environment for English communication and serve as a living example of productive international interaction to your students. In general, you will be the T2 (assistant teacher), meaning the JTE will serve on point as the lead and you will provide the necessary support. Now there will be times when you will only be asked to read from the textbook, but remember that you serve as the model for native pronunciation and intonation that is vital for students to grasp early on. It is also important to start breaking down their reliance on katakana as a crutch, as while it may aid understanding early on, it is ultimately detrimental to producing intelligible English speech in the long run. Of course, how lessons are structured will depend much on your JTE and how they perceive the level of the students. They are ultimately responsible for ensuring that their students meet the criteria set out in the curriculum and make it into high school, along with all the expectations and pressure that entails. And so, even when you are playing a secondary role, use it as an opportunity to go around the class and assist students who might be struggling. You can also interact with students outside of class during lunch, cleaning time and club activities, to give students an avenue to practice English outside of the pressures and structure of the classroom. Use your own discretion to assess the level of your students and address them with the appropriate level of grammar, vocabulary and language speed.

TEACHING AT ACADEMIC HIGH SCHOOL

Adele-Elise Prevost (Niigata Prefecture, 2011-13)

You may be placed at what is often called an academic school. These are usually high schools with strict entrance requirements and a reputation for excellence; however, a recent system gaining popularity is Secondary School (*chuto kyoiku gakko*, frequently abbreviated to '*chuto*'), which covers the six years of junior and senior high school and tends to fall under the rubric of 'academic school' as well.

Although academic excellence in any field defines a high-level school, these frequently have a strong English component, and as such an ALT may encounter particular challenges and opportunities. For instance, you may be asked to play a more active part in lesson planning and curriculum design or even to take on the central teaching role for certain classes. The games and activities that make up the core of many team-teaching experiences may not be as relevant at academic schools; instead, the focus might be on helping students through fast-paced, challenging textbooks. ALTs at academic high schools will often have expectations and responsibilities outside the classroom as well. Students often participate in local or national English-language speech contests, and you will be asked to proofread and advise them on their speech and coach them in preparation for the competition. Some may be planning a home stay in an English-speaking country and require help getting ready and overcoming their nerves. You might also be asked to oversee a pen-pal system with a school in a foreign country, prepare students for debates, or help with club or school festival projects.

Teaching at an academic school can be a great chance to go beyond the responsibilities of an average ALT, but be careful: it is easy to take on too much, especially at the beginning, so you should be honest about what you can and cannot do. Be enthusiastic and positive about getting involved in

your students' educational experience, but remember how to say no. If you are feeling under-utilised in a textbook-driven class, talk to your JTE about changing things up once in a while with a fast-paced quiz game or interactive speaking activity. On the other hand, if you find yourself with more classroom responsibility than feels comfortable, let your JTE know. Leading a classroom can be a fantastic experience, and make the most of it if you feel up to it, but remember that the priority is the students. If you do not think they will benefit from your taking the lead, there is no shame in stepping back. Finally, when it comes to speech contests, debates, and home stays, this is really your chance to shine. Students will be coming to you wanting to learn not only how to conjugate, but how to communicate. You can emphasise things like eye contact, body language, and intonation, as well as overcoming shyness and telling your opinion openly, which are aspects of communication that students frequently struggle with. The great thing about teaching at an academic school is that your students will often already have a sufficient grasp of English to broach these topics with them, so you can help them become more skillful, joyful, and natural speakers of English.

If you are an ALT at an academic high school, you may feel daunted by the educational and professional responsibilities your workplace expects of you. Take solace in your opportunity to have rewarding interactions with your students and JTEs. Students at academic schools tend to be motivated, hardworking, and interested in English and in international exchange. That means they will be interested in you! Also, these types of schools tend to know how to best utilise your presence and your skills, so it can often be a very satisfying work experience. Finally, much like the students, your JTEs and other colleagues are likely to have a certain mastery of English and a positive outlook towards cultural exchange. For all the effort you put into your academic high school, you can get as much and more out of it.

TEACHING AT VOCATIONAL SCHOOL

Cecilia Lam (Fukuoka Prefecture, 2009-)

About one-third of Senior High School students in Japan enroll in non-academic/vocational programmes. There are three common types of vocational schools: Technical/Industrial (*kogyo*), Commercial (*shogyo*), and Agricultural (*nogyo*). Some schools also offer courses in fishery, nursing, or other areas. Some schools are full-time, while others offer part-time courses (*teijisei*).

The focus of vocational schools is to provide students with the knowledge and skills to work in various industries after graduation. Students enrolled in vocational schools may not continue on to post-secondary education, so you should adjust your lesson goals accordingly to fit their needs and interests.

Students at vocational schools have varying levels of motivation and English ability. Since many vocational schools do not focus on university entrance exams, many ALTs find that they have more freedom in creating lessons involving communicative activities and practical English outside of standard textbooks and grammar patterns. Rather than preparing students for university entrance examinations, the goal is to provide students with English immediately applicable to their life and work after graduation. Vocational schools also present a unique opportunity to learn about aspects of Japanese life that are not widely available to most ALTs (e.g., in the fields of Japanese agriculture, manufacturing, etc.).

Unlike students at traditional academic schools, students at vocational schools tend to be more candid and forthright in expressing interest in their English classes. Sometimes this means lots of energetic class participation, but other times it may mean the opposite. Though some students may start off with relatively low English abilities and interest, and in some cases there may be difficulties with classroom management, try to engage students by making lessons more relevant to their course specializations and future jobs. Treat them like adults who will soon enter the work force rather than younger teenagers. Build up their skills and challenge them with material that is not too easy but not too difficult.

Not all vocational schools have extra-curricular clubs or school events like culture festivals, but getting involved wherever you can is a great way to support your students and interact with them outside of the classroom when they tend to be more relaxed and social.

Working at vocational schools is a unique opportunity that not many JET participants are able to experience. Whether you work full- or part-time at a vocational school, being positive, flexible, and willing to adapt to your surroundings will surely reward you with many unforgettable moments and memories.

SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION

Allison Lanthrum (Nara Prefecture, 2011-)

In recent years new emphasis has been placed on improving special needs education.

Teaching at a special education school gives one a glimpse into a side of Japan that is not usually seen in other Japanese schools. Most ALTs that visit or are based at a special education school are placed in schools for the visually impaired, hearing impaired, or occasionally health impaired. All of these students study English, just like their counterparts in other schools. Although teaching at a special education school presents one with a different set of challenges than those faced in other schools, there is also a number of advantages. Class sizes tend to be much smaller than those in other schools and there are many people to help the teachers, so the student to teacher/helper ratio tends to be higher, on average 1:2 or 1:3.

The atmosphere in the classroom and the school is also a big plus. The students depend on each other and their teachers, so there is a strong feeling of warmth, love and kinship. This helps to create a very positive learning environment. There is less pressure than at an academic school, and there are usually few problems with discipline. The teachers are incredibly energetic and enthusiastic. In the past there were not enough trained teachers to work in special education schools, and this meant that teachers were brought in from other mainstream schools, but this is changing as more teachers are trained in special education. Of course, much depends on the type of the students' particular special needs, however below are some things that should be kept in mind when teaching and planning lessons for special education students:

- **Teaching visually impaired students:** Since visually impaired students usually cannot see you, teaching activities should use the other senses; hearing, smell, touch and so on. Directions need to be given verbally, not with gestures. Although many or most of the students are not able to see, they listen extremely well, and are very well attuned to what is happening around them.
- **Teaching hearing impaired students:** Many hearing impaired students "listen" with their eyes watching their teachers' mouths, expressions, and gestures. Sign language is not always used, so it is very important that the students are able to see your face and gestures clearly. It is sometimes very difficult to understand what the students are saying when they are speaking to you (in addition to sign language, the students must learn how to speak Japanese). Often you need to have another teacher help you understand what they are saying. Learning some Japanese sign language can be a great help.
- **Teaching health impaired students:** These are students who are too sick to go to school on a regular basis, or be in a mainstream school because they need special attention. The degree of illness varies greatly between the students. Sometimes you do not know what is wrong with the students, or if it is something serious or not. It is very helpful (as well as important) to talk with the teachers about the condition of each student so that you will know what kind of conditions you are working with. The illnesses of the students may limit some of the activities that you are able to use in class.

If you happen to visit a school for the physically or mentally challenged, the most important thing to remember is that there is a great difference in the degree of special needs that the students have.

Some of the students are able to communicate easily, while others have a very difficult time. Sometimes you may wonder if you are getting through to the students at all, but rest assured that they know you are there, and are happy to see you.

TEACHING AT MULTIPLE SCHOOLS

David Flynn (Aomori Prefecture, 2011-) and Julia Mace (Kagawa Prefecture, 2009-)

The likelihood that you will find yourself teaching at multiple schools is quite high. Teaching at multiple schools can be a highly rewarding experience but it can also present its own unique challenges. The number of schools any one ALT can visit in this situation varies greatly from less than five schools in your community to as many as 50 or more spread out over the countryside. If you find yourself looking at your class schedule and wondering how you are going to handle the sheer amount of schools you will be visiting, try to relax and know that there are ways in which you can not only properly manage this situation but can also turn it to your advantage and use it to increase your level of work satisfaction and fun.

Challenges and Rewards

Let us go over what is really great about teaching at multiple schools. First, the likelihood of you getting stuck in a routine will be highly reduced. You also have the opportunity to meet more teachers, students and fellow members of your community, increasing your opportunities to connect in meaningful ways with more people. Teaching at more schools also equates to variation in the classes you will teach, the teachers you will teach with and the students you will teach. More schools also means more events, clubs and activities for you to get involved with.

Now let us review the challenges. For most ALTs facing a schedule with multiple schools, their first concern is wondering how they can form meaningful relationships with both teachers and students when they may perhaps be at each school very infrequently and sporadically. Other concerns include time management, keeping your classes and lessons organised, travelling between schools and the logistics of getting involved outside of the classroom in extra-curricular activities like school clubs or sports days.

Building Relationships

Let us first address how to create meaningful interaction in what will probably be a very limited amount of time. There are numerous ways in which this can be done and of course there is no cookie cutter answer that will work for every situation. You will have to use your intuition and navigate each situation. This being the case, the first advice we would give is to make sure you remain attentive. Every school has a lot going on and many things to consider, and of course there will always be a certain dynamic of how teachers and students are relating with each other before you ever arrive on the scene. These are all factors that you cannot control, however, catching on to whether or not a colleague is quiet or outgoing for instance, or whether a situation requires a highly professional approach or if the atmosphere is more relaxed and fun and then adjusting your behavior accordingly will be highly appreciated by your Japanese co-workers and will go a long way in making a good first impression. Beyond this, always look for opportunities to find common ground, share your culture or ask about theirs, make jokes or ask for advice. It only takes one key moment to create the foundation for meaningful interaction so try to develop the interpersonal skills to have this happen in a relatively short amount of time.

Getting to Know your Students

When it comes to getting related with your students the same advice will apply. Stay attentive. A positive outgoing attitude will go a long way and when it comes to your students, just be yourself.

You are not only there to teach them English but to also create the opportunity for positive intercultural exchange. Have fun! Also, when teaching at multiple schools, you may have literally hundreds of students. Remembering all of their names is certainly a daunting task, if not impossible, and no one expects you to fully do so. However, giving it your all to remember as many names as possible will be huge for creating good relationships. You can keep a notebook of names, and many schools have student lists (with photos). You can always ask for a copy to help you remember. It can also be fun to give your students cute or funny nicknames that are easy for you to remember, but showing them that you do in fact remember their real names will mean a lot to them.

Your First Visit

In terms of the more logistical challenges, it is important to be prepared. The Japanese school system is fairly consistent so learn the basics. In every school you will need to find the teacher's room first. When it comes to meeting the staff, your priority is introducing yourself to the Principal, Vice Principal and your JTEs in whichever order they may appear. Do not worry if your Japanese is not strong, you can simply prepare a few simple greetings that will work for everywhere you go.

Scheduling

One of the most common challenges is scheduling. You may find that you are away from your desk for weeks on end. When you are not able to visit your base school regularly you may not receive important information from your supervisor on time or your lessons may suffer because you do not have the opportunity to make new materials, do research, or get advice from your JTEs. If you find that this is the case, talk to your supervisor about creating a regularly repeating schedule. The goal is to balance the time at your base school with the time at your away schools. If your away schools are spread out evenly throughout your schedule you will be able to check in regularly, regroup, and get ready for the next round of teaching. A regular schedule will also benefit your teachers and students by allowing your JTEs to know exactly when you are available to teach with them. In addition, if you visit a school regularly, you are more likely to be seen as a part of the staff rather than a visitor. When organising your school visits and classes, remember to also schedule in the time it will take to travel from school to school. You may be visiting more than one school in a day. If ever the travel time or conditions are genuinely unreasonable, then speak to your supervisor in order to find solutions.

Class Records

Another common challenge is "keeping the schools straight". With literally dozens of classes to prepare for, it can be difficult to remember who did what and when. But, with a little diligence you can overcome this challenge. Keep a small notebook with your "away school gear". A good way to organise your notebook is to divide it into sections by school and then by grade. You can also use this book to record the names of teachers, staff and the English teaching materials that each school has available for you. After every class, write down the date and the topics you covered in your notebook. Include descriptions of the activities, the students' attitudes, and what materials you used. Keep in mind, though, that this notebook will only help you if you write in it after every single class. It sounds like a lot of work but this notebook has the potential to save you so many times that you will soon find it indispensable.

For lessons, although you may be teaching a greater variety, they will repeat and probably do so quite frequently, especially your self-introduction. Have a really strong self-introduction prepared that you can tailor to 5, 10, 20 or 45 minutes depending on what the situation requires. Becoming an expert in the lessons you will regularly give and using an agenda will be highly useful tools in keeping yourself organised. Planning out your day or week in advance will save you a lot of potential trouble.

Teaching with Multiple JTEs

ALTs teaching at multiple schools have the challenge of communicating with multiple English teachers. Typically, this means your JTEs and homeroom teachers in elementary school. But it can also mean independently contracted JTEs who now work at many elementary schools. Suffice it to say, it is difficult to make an effective lesson plan with someone you rarely (or never) see face to face.

That is why it is important for you to take the initiative and collect the contact information of your fellow English teachers. Ask each of your schools early on about their English language curriculum and who is involved. You can even ask to see the other teachers' schedules so you know how they fit in with yours. If you get the phone numbers and especially the e-mail addresses of the people you are working with and communicate with them regularly you will be able to save yourself a lot of unnecessary work and provide a smooth flow of learning to your students. It is up to you to ask each of your schools to put you in touch with the right people, even if those people are not a part of the school's regular staff. Do not worry about asking for this information or about contacting your teachers. Most of them are more than happy to exchange a few text messages to make sure that your team teaching will always be on track.

School Events

All of your schools will have events, clubs and extra-curricular activities. You will most likely be invited to many. Although we often want to jump in and get involved, it might be a bad idea to accept all invitations. Doing this could leave you burned out which will not benefit anyone. A good idea is to prioritize these invitations in terms of the actual level of interaction and impact you can have there, and then to alternate between schools, giving as many the opportunity to interact with you as possible.

In the end, any placement you receive, regardless of the number of schools on your schedule, has the potential to be a highly rewarding and fun experience depending on what you make of it. Teaching at multiple schools has been a highlight for us and has only created more opportunities, more fun and more friends.

OTHER ALT DUTIES

The ALT's job does not end in the classroom. While teaching is the ALT's primary responsibility, there may be other duties that ALTs are expected to perform. For the most part, these duties take place during working hours, and sometimes they even replace regular school visits. As such, they can provide a welcome respite from the daily teaching routine. The wide range of miscellaneous duties may seem daunting, but there is no need to worry! Feel free to ask other JET participants for help, as they probably had similar experiences. Do not forget to ask for your colleagues' assistance. You might want to contact neighbouring CIRs as they too are involved in similar duties. In general, all you will need is your own creativity, imagination, and energy. Take advantage of the opportunities that lie before you! It is impossible to list, or even anticipate, all of the activities that an ALT might be asked to perform as each job varies so greatly. Nevertheless, the following compilation, while not exhaustive, covers the most common extra duties that ALTs may face.

CLUB ACTIVITIES

ALTs have the opportunity to take part in many language-related activities outside the classroom. ALTs can take part in English conversation clubs with their students, set up letter-writing or e-mail links with schools in their home countries, exchange journals with students, make bulletin boards, and help with the evaluation of the students. They may be asked to coach students or make model-reading tapes for speech contests at the local, regional or prefectural level, and may also be asked to judge such contests. Some ALTs also take part in informal English conversation classes with the teachers in their schools. Others may be asked to teach evening or weekend classes to groups of adults, ranging from city hall employees to housewives, bank tellers to firefighters.

However, there are many more non-language related extra-curricular activities that ALTs can also become involved with. In Japanese junior and senior high schools, club activities play a very important role in the lives of the students. There are many opportunities for ALTs to take part in one

of the many clubs, ranging from sports clubs such as volleyball, tennis, and karate, to clubs focusing on cultural activities, such as music, tea ceremony, and calligraphy. Interacting with the students in a non-classroom situation has many advantages. It can help you to feel more a part of the school, and getting to know your students outside of the classroom can help with relations in the classroom. Getting involved in one of the many events held during the year in your school can also be a great chance to see your students and teachers in a different light and to become really involved in the life of your school.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLUBS

This is a great opportunity to speak English with enthusiastic students, though you may be left in charge with little or no guidelines. So what can you do?

Contribute as much time and effort as you can to the club. It is worth it for the students. Be certain to include the teacher and encourage him/her to think of new ideas, too. Remember, you will leave in a short time, but the teacher will most likely be a club advisor for a long time. Ideas you bring to the table may continue to be used even after you are gone.

First, make a schedule. Do not assume that the students will plan or initiate anything on their own. Making collages, writing comics, and cooking are just some of the events students might enjoy. Following are some examples:

- A bulletin board in a prominent place or on part of every grade's noticeboard. Here you and the club can put reports on school activities, stories, words, cartoons, newspaper articles, maps and guides to your country/town, festival guides, etc. If you make it current and relevant, English will become more real and interesting for your students.
- A newsletter once a month with reports on students' activities and school events. Publish their creative work and let them read about themselves in English.
- Show films in the foreign language and have oral or written quizzes about the film with a small prize for the winner.
- Theme parties (or swap recipes) for Hannukkah, Christmas, Halloween, etc.

The activities should try to get the students to think as much as possible in English. Try to do this by having as little written material in the club as possible and by having plenty of timed games.

SUMMER CAMP AND STUDENT SEMINARS

A change in atmosphere does wonders to help the students and the teachers (including you) relax. Plan a summer school; spend a few days doing intensive English activities with the English club or a small voluntary group of students and some of your teachers. In all areas of Japan there are small getaways perfect for a summer or spring English camp. This may be the first chance students and teachers have to spend a chunk of time with a foreigner, and it is an experience they will always remember. It is your opportunity to teach not only how native speakers speak their language, but some cultural differences as well. If you want to start one, talk to you JTE. It may be difficult at first however, so discuss the possibility as early as possible.

Above all, be organised. Over-preparation is better than under-preparation. As with a teachers' seminar, start by presenting a schedule. The students want to know what is ahead. From the start, stress that making mistakes is okay; one can learn from making mistakes. It may be the first time for students to encounter this concept. It encourages them to speak and not to worry about producing words in a correct grammar pattern. You, the foreigner, have a great deal of influence in creating the atmosphere. Perhaps many students chose to attend summer school for the simple reason that you are there. Use it to your advantage and theirs.

GIVING SPEECHES

You also may be asked to make speeches, especially if your level of Japanese is good or if you have been in Japan more than one year. Usual audiences would be the Parent Teachers Association, area teachers' meetings, the local youth group, Rotary Clubs and International Associations, etc. Topics may include internationalisation, education in your home country, first impressions of Japan or your work as an ALT. If the topic appears impossible (e.g. you know nothing about the subject, or your Japanese is not up to it), then do not hesitate to say so, either to your supervisor, or to the person who has asked you to give the speech.

Begin preparing the speech as far in advance as possible. Allow yourself plenty of time to write out the speech, especially the first few times, and check you know all the terminology that you will need. It is also a wise idea to practice a couple of times before giving the speech. In time, you will probably find that note-form is adequate. Some people also ask a colleague to make a copy of the speech on tape to practice from. Make sure that your office appreciates how much time you need to prepare your speech and that they allow you to have it.

A one-and-a-half hour or two hour speech may seem very daunting the first time you are asked to give one. But the time does tend to go very quickly. Using slides, a video, a worksheet or questionnaire, and having question time are all good ways to break up the time and make it a more interesting presentation for you and for the audience. Make a conscious effort to build up a repertoire of anecdotes to illustrate points in your speech and fill any awkward silences. If you find yourself giving a lot of speeches, then keep a speech diary to record who you have given a speech to and the topic, and also to provide a file that you can refer to in preparing speeches in the future.

Make yourself known outside your office if you want to increase your speaking opportunities. This applies especially to ALTs working in small towns. Your office may dispatch you to other towns, government offices, or local community organisations. When accepting a speech, find out as many details as possible about the audience, the room and the equipment available.

Keep a file of references for use in speeches - newspaper clippings, information from embassies, quotes and so on. You will probably find yourself giving a speech on the same topic and so building up a file of information will keep your speeches up-to-date and interesting.

If a colleague or friend accompanied you to your speech, ask for some honest feedback afterwards. You may also find it useful to record yourself giving the speech. By listening to the tape later you can make improvements to both your Japanese and your style of presentation. Otherwise, follow the rules that apply to public speaking in your own language - speak slowly and relax.

SEMINARS FOR JAPANESE TEACHERS

There are basically two types of JTE seminars. One is a short-term seminar in which the teachers assemble for two or more days of meetings and activities. There is usually no follow-up. The other is a long-term seminar in which the JTEs meet periodically during a more protracted period of time, often a year. The main difference is that during a long-term seminar, the teachers are able to complete fairly involved projects, e.g. the JTEs could take a year to research a topic and then, during the last meeting, give a 30-minute presentation. You might find that your supervisor has a certain goal and procedure in mind for the seminar, or you may be asked to prepare everything yourself. Before beginning a seminar, consider the following points:

- Be organised and over-prepared. Assume that you will have to do most of the talking, especially in the beginning.
- Know what the JTEs want and expect to gain from the seminar. Know approximately who will

participate and the level of language ability.

- Relax. Having to listen to and speak English for hours on end is tiring for the JTEs, and for the ALT as well. Allow sufficient break time but try to structure the time so it is constructive, i.e. songs, light conversation, games, etc.
- Challenge the JTEs with not only language, but difficult topics as well. Striving to grasp such topics and then respond to them in the foreign language is good practice for the JTEs, and it will give them a feeling of accomplishment, too.

Getting Started

Explain in general terms what you have in mind for the format of the seminar, mentioning that you welcome ideas and suggestions from the JTEs themselves. Be sure to explain the purpose of the seminar and why you perceive it to be of benefit. One very positive reason you can mention is that officials in MEXT see the ALT section of the JET Programme as a means of enabling JTEs to improve both their language and their teaching techniques.

The following is a brief list of possible topics for use at such a seminar:

- lesson planning/lesson evaluation
- basic TEFL/TESL theory
- classroom vocabulary
- creative use of the authorised text
- effective dialogues for classroom use
- creative and effective drilling in the classroom
- communicative activities
- pronunciation and intonation activities
- use of video/drama/debate in the classroom
- how to improve English ability
- common mistakes
- idioms
- information and activities regarding your home country
- newspaper/magazine articles
- internationalization
- the school system

Do not criticise teaching techniques!

ENGLISH EDUCATION FOR RETURNEE STUDENTS

You may encounter a student with outstanding English skills as a result of having spent anywhere from a few years to their entire lives in foreign countries where, most likely, their parents were posted. These returnees present a perplexing problem to Japanese educators. Unless they attended one of the many Japanese schools abroad, these students are usually far behind their classmates in such subjects as Japanese language, history, mathematics, and science. Also, adjusting to the Japanese system can be very difficult for the students- both academically and socially.

Imagine that you have been living in Canada for 13 years. You are thoroughly integrated into the system and only different from your peers by way of having been born in Japan and brought to Canada as a baby. Next imagine being taken away from your present home, your town and your friends, and being introduced to a different culture and education system. After the initial shock, you begin to settle in, although you have some problems with the Japanese language (which you have learnt from weekly lessons and from your parents, but which is a language you have never had to use outside the home). Some returnees suffer from culture shock and they frequently become very cynical about their role in a Japanese school and critical of Japan.

Dealing with the returnee student in the English language classroom requires that the teacher be

sensitive to that student's attitude and relationship with other students. Many returnee students do not wish to differ from their classmates any more than necessary. Such students don't appreciate any extra attention drawn to their "special" language ability. Other returnees are admired by their classmates who are anxious to see and hear their friend conversing fluently with a native speaker. In such a case, the returnee student can be a valuable resource for the ALT by talking about his/her experiences abroad, taking part in textbook dialogues, or even acting as interpreter. The importance of assessing the degree to which each returnee student is willing to participate in the English class must be stressed again.

Outside of class, returnee students are often more willing to chat with the ALT about their experiences abroad, and in some cases, ALTs are asked to conduct special classes for returnee students at the elementary, junior high and senior high school levels. The main purpose of these classes, generally held after school or on Saturdays, is to help returnee students maintain their English language skills. These classes give returnees a chance to meet and share experiences with other students who have lived abroad. It is useful for them to meet other students who may be experiencing similar readjustment difficulties.

Working with returnee students is generally a very enjoyable experience for the ALT as well. Not only is it possible to conduct higher level language activities with the students, but most ALTs find that their returnee students are refreshingly candid about their feelings and ideas compared to the junior or senior high school students with whom they are accustomed to working.

There can be a certain amount of frustration in working with returnee students, however. Their English language abilities differ according to how long they lived abroad and where they lived. And there is a tendency to assume that if a child lived anywhere outside of Japan, he or she is capable of speaking English. This tends to be assumed regardless of where the child lived or for how long. It can happen that one finds a student who lived in Germany and understands no English or a child who lived in Britain between the ages of 2 and 3 in the "returnee students" English class. Try to assess the level of the student's English. Even if he or she can speak fluently, it is possible that their grammar needs help.

Generally speaking, special English classes for returnee students are rewarding for both students and the ALT. It is a chance for the ALT to escape from text-related activities and to be more creative. Also, it is a chance for returnee students to enjoy speaking English in a relaxed atmosphere. Perhaps most importantly, however, it is a way to help students preserve fond memories of their days abroad while helping them to readjust to life in Japan.

SETTING AND MARKING EXAMS

ALTs may be asked to create or to assist with exams. When you are faced with the daunting task of marking papers, be positive. Try to give a mark for everything that the student does know, rather than focusing on the mistakes. If you are not specifically checking vocabulary, does it really matter that the spelling is not one hundred percent correct? Should you correct words that the sympathetic reader could understand? There should also be an allowance for more than one correct answer, which is often not the case in traditionally marked exams. If a full answer is required, this should be indicated on the exam paper. You could also have a system whereby a full answer receives so many points and a one word answer merits just one point. This would help to encourage those slow learners in every class. This system can also be used for the speaking tests. Be sure to go through the exam with the class after you have marked and given back the papers. This will make it a learning process.

If you are asked to create the exam alone, something that rarely happens, do not hesitate to ask to see previous exams to find out what format the class is used to, and the pages of the textbook and grammar to be tested (the students will need to know this too). The following are a few thoughts on what sort of things to test and how they may be tested.

The first step is to consider what the purpose of the test is. Generally speaking, tests are to

determine whether the students have a good understanding of the material that has previously been taught. They are therefore to test what one knows rather than pointing out what one does not know and can be seen as a positive evaluation rather than a negative one.

When setting the questions it is important to think about the process that the student will go through before the answer is reached. For example, if one asks (in Japanese) for the past tense of "has," what will a correct answer show? It will probably mean the student understands the meaning of the term *kakokei* (past tense) and has memorised the verb pattern. This is fine if you are testing memorisation ability, but does not do much else.

If one wants to discover whether the student can actually use the memorised information, there are a number of options. For example, sentences are given in the present tense, the verbs are underlined and the students requested to put them into the future tense. Although a comprehension of the rest of the sentence is beneficial, it is not entirely necessary. If you intend to check the comprehension of the verbs being used, you can omit the verbs and put the plain form (eg. to wash) in a box at the bottom of a short text. Sentences can also be changed from singular to plural forms, etc.

A more creative way to test a grammar point would be to have a picture which students have to describe. For example, a park scene for ___ing forms; two consecutive scenes for tenses, comparisons, or prepositions. Grammar can also be tested by requesting that a dialogue be written, again with key words included.

Comprehension of vocabulary and sentence structure can be checked by having students draw a picture from a description. In the lower levels, pictures can be labelled, or coloured in. At a more advanced level, students could be given the task of finding words with the same meaning as words underlined in a text.

Listening comprehension also has several purposes. If you are listening for the meaning, students are given a question and have to circle one of three given answers. Similarly, they all read a statement and have to guess which picture it fits. To check spelling and comprehension, dictation or one of the several variations of dictation can be given.

To check spoken language ability, it seems that one has two options. One option is that certain lessons are designated as speaking ability evaluation time, with the responses given taken as indicators of the student's level of fluency. The other option is to take students out of a normal language lesson, either individually or in small groups (in which all boys or all girls is best, since students become shy in front of the opposite sex). Questions asked can be the usual ones asked in class: do you like, do you have, when is, etc. A picture can be used to test vocabulary, ___ing forms, etc.

Remember to check the timing. Allow time at the start for letting the students settle down, for handing out the papers, for explaining the format, for explaining how much time is given and for answering students' questions. A reminder of how much time remains should be given five or ten minutes before the exam finishes.

PREPARING FOR EIKEN EXAMINATIONS

Karl Hoeschen (Saitama Prefecture, 2010-13)

ALTs may be asked to assist with preparing students for the Eiken test. This test, run by the Society for Testing English Proficiency (STEP), has been a standard for measuring English language proficiency since 1963. It has been a benchmark for communication skills endorsed by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) since 1968. The test has seven grades of difficulty, and is offered three times annually in Japan. Japanese citizens can use a successful Eiken test for admissions and course credit at over 2,500 high schools, colleges, and universities. Junior high school students, for example, can have a significant edge over competing students applying to the same high school if they have an Eiken level three or higher accreditation on top of their other academic achievements. The same is true for high school students applying to universities and for graduates who wish to join workplaces that require skill in English

communication.

Eiken tests can be frustrating for students due to their difficulty and from lack of practice. ALTs can combat this by utilising free preparation resources from STEP and preparing classroom examples of their specific language targets to familiarise students with the writing and speaking tests' procedures and content. Examples from previous years are available at no cost on the stepeiken.org/downloads website. The same site also includes "Virtual Speaking Tests" that showcase how the speaking portion is conducted by Eiken examiners. This resource can be particularly useful for ALTs who have practice interview sessions with their students. By practicing with the ALT with previous test materials, students are more likely to pass their Eiken tests, reducing the amount of time and money they would have otherwise spent to retake the test for their desired level. These resources can make a crucial difference for the test taker.

The ALT's role in preparing students for Eiken tests is to create grammar and vocabulary examples in the classroom and provide practice interview examinations. An ALT can address several common problem areas of the written test by emphasising the usage of prepositions and particles, and how to answer the different forms of questions. ("What" questions require the answer to start with "It is". "Why" requires "Because", and "Where" requires preposition usage, etc.) A specific, more effective strategy can be created for students' needs by learning what levels of the Eiken test they will be taking and researching STEP's most current examples on the stepeiken.org website. Successful test takers of level three and higher exams have about a month before they take a live interview exam conducted completely in English. The ALT prepares the students by practicing previous versions of Eiken interviews with them.

Eiken tests can simultaneously provide the greatest challenge and source of confidence for Japanese EFL learners. An ALT who prepares students with the STEP resources makes all the difference for them.

THE SCHOOL DAY

Schedules differ from school to school and can vary quite dramatically between junior and senior high schools, so it is impossible to give any hard and fast rules about what your day will involve. The following is a guide as to how one senior high school works and is meant to give you an idea of what you may be able to expect every day at school:

- 08:10** Morning staff meeting (*shokuin chorei*): All the teachers gather together to discuss the day's activities and to give important notices. Junior teachers (including the ALT) hardly ever speak at these meetings but attendance is compulsory. Teachers usually arrive shortly before this meeting although some arrive much earlier, along with many students, for morning study, club activities or other preparations. Some teachers will also stand by the front gate to greet students as they arrive at school. Aim to arrive at least five minutes early. If you arrive late, it is likely that no one will say anything to you, but people will notice and if you do it habitually you could well find that your coworkers are not willing to view you as a responsible staff member.
- 08:20** Form meeting (homeroom): Homeroom teachers go to their homerooms and relay important messages and check attendance. Teachers who are not in charge of a class stay in the staff room.
- 08:40** First period: In the morning there are usually four periods of fifty minutes each with a break of ten minutes between each one. Teachers generally spend about three or four periods in the classroom every day and the rest of the time is spent preparing lessons and doing other necessary paperwork.
- 12:30** Lunch time: Eating lunch with your students is a great way to get involved at school.
- 13:15** There are usually two periods of 50 minutes each in the afternoons with a ten minute break between each one.

- 15:15** Cleaning time: Students are responsible for cleaning their own classrooms and the school buildings and grounds. Teachers are assigned areas to supervise and help with. Often the ALT is not assigned anywhere but your help is greatly appreciated. It is a good idea to rotate the places you help clean so that you can have contact with as many students as possible. They will appreciate your help with their chores, and it is a very good opportunity to speak to them in a less formal atmosphere.
- 15:35** Form meeting (homeroom): Similar to the morning homeroom, but this time the class discusses the following day's schedule.
- 15:50** If there is no seventh period students start their club activities. The percentage of students who belong to a club depends on the school, but it is usually quite high. Going to the clubs is an excellent way to get to know the students and they will be glad you are showing such an interest in them. There is a whole range of clubs from sports teams to arts clubs (tea ceremony, brass band, etc.). Use your judgment as to which club you can join in and which club it would be better to just watch. There is often an English Speaking Society (ESS) or foreign language society which may be glad of your help. In some instances you may be expected to help them on a regular basis. Find out who the teacher in charge is and speak with them about joining.
- 18:00** Students and teachers start leaving any time after homeroom depending if they have anything scheduled that day. Clubs generally finish by the time it becomes dark at 18:00, but there are usually students and particularly teachers who stay late studying or preparing for the following day.

One thing that may surprise you is that the daily timetable is very flexible. The length of periods is often cut by five or ten minutes each and sometimes whole periods are cut or added to accommodate special school events. Usually these changes are scheduled, for example, to allow time for extra cleaning, PTA meetings, exams, school council elections, the school culture festival, and so on. Sometimes, however, they are unexpected, for example when lessons are cut due to bad weather or because an emergency has occurred and the staff need a long meeting. These changes in the schedule (*nittei henko*) are usually discussed at the morning meetings and written on the staffroom blackboard. In the beginning your supervisor should tell you about them, but you should learn to notice changes yourself as soon as you can.

THE SCHOOL YEAR

As with the school day, the yearly schedule varies from school to school and it is impossible to give any hard and fast rules. The following is an example of one senior high school. Your school will probably follow an entirely different schedule - some of these events may not even take place and your school could have some of its own unique events planned. What follows should give you a rough idea of the type of events that take place over the year in most schools:

- September:** Opening Ceremony - The school gathers in the gym for the first time after the summer break. There is usually a long cleaning period and exams for the students in the next few days. (Take note that the school year begins in April.)
- October:** Culture Festival (*Bunkasai*) - Usually a huge event in the school calendar for senior high schools. Each class prepares an exhibition and each club holds an event. There is a whole timetable of fun events over the two days of the festival and students often spend months in advance in preparations. The third day of the festival in some schools is the Sports Day (*Taiikusai*) when all students get involved in sports events. In Japanese schools the emphasis of the Sports Day is on fun, exercise, competition, and teamwork.
- November:** School Marathon (*Jikyuso Taikai*) - Students all take part in the annual school run. Nowadays this is often a short race of about ten kilometres although some schools still have a full (26 mile) marathon course and students have to attempt it. You should go

out to cheer the students along, or better yet, ask if you can train with them in the months running up to it and run the course with them.

- December:** Closing Ceremony - Another meeting in the gym to officially end the school term. Christmas Day is not a public holiday in Japan. Schools usually close down from December 29 until January 3 for New Year holidays. Check with your supervisor to see when your school holidays are.
- January:** Opening Ceremony.
Nationwide University Qualifying Exams (Centre Examinations) - Third year senior high school students planning to go to university usually have to take these exams. These nationwide exams largely determine which level of university each student should apply for and so cause much anxiety for students and teachers alike.
- February:** School Trip (*Shugaku Ryoko*) - Second graders go on a trip together with a group of staff members, often to somewhere famous in Japan, although there is a recent trend for some schools to go skiing or overseas. It is not usually possible for the ALT to attend but if you are sincerely interested in going, you should consult with your school.
Home study - Third year students are often allowed to stay at home to revise and prepare for their next move.
- March:** Graduation Ceremony (*Sotsugyoshiki*) - Parents, the entire school and various local dignitaries gather to award the third graders with their graduation certificates. It is a happy event. Be sure to wear your best formal clothes. Suits or smart dresses are appropriate.
Staff Changes - During their careers, teachers are likely to be transferred several times. Only about two weeks' notice is given, so the end of March is a very busy time for many teachers. There is usually an assortment of farewell ceremonies and parties.
- April:** Orientation for new students - This usually lasts a week or so and can take place in school or off the school grounds. Again, an opening ceremony will also be held.
School Outing (*Ensoku*) - These are one-day trips to a local area, either of historical interest or of natural beauty. Usually the trip leaves very early in the morning and returns in the early evening, often with an *enkai* for the teachers. Sportswear is often worn if walking is involved and you will probably need to take a packed lunch with you (but make sure to confirm both of these). If you go by bus, there may be entertainment on the bus, help the "entertainment committee" produce quizzes and songs. You may be asked to sing anyway.
- May/June:** Generally quiet months except for sports clubs which may have prefectural tournaments. The baseball team in particular may be busy training as the national school championship qualifying rounds are taking place. The championships held at Koshien are a national institution and many students dream of making it there.
- July:** Closing Ceremony and the beginning of the summer holidays. Many students and teachers still come to school during vacation time to study, participate in school clubs, or prepare for the next semester.

SCHOOL EVENTS IN DETAIL

Sports Day (*undokai*)

These can take place in both the autumn and summer. As an ALT, you may be asked to participate by running in track races, helping with cheering, passing out beverages, or holding the finishing

tape.

School Trip (*shugaku ryoko*)

In the first and second semesters, the second grade students depart on a three-day trip (*shugaku ryoko*) to places like Tokyo, Kyoto, Hiroshima, or Okinawa. ALTs are not always part of these trips, but, if you are interested in going, discuss the possibility with your supervisor. There is often entertainment on the chartered buses - you can make song sheets and quizzes. The latter can be along the lines of scoring points for things seen on the way - e.g. a post office, an umbrella, etc. During the visits to Disneyland, aquariums, temples, etc., you can either join a group of students or go around with the teachers. In the evenings there are various meetings before you go to bed. These trips often become cherished memories for the students.

Cultural Festival (*bunkasai*)

This is one of the biggest events of the year. A lot of preparation is put into making displays in each of the classrooms, organising stalls of things to sell, a restaurant and different events. It is usually held on a Saturday in October or November, and anyone is welcome to attend. There are many ways you can assist, especially in the mammoth preparations that take place for several weeks. Even if you are not actually involved on the day, your presence would be greatly appreciated. It is also a great chance to meet the parents or engage with the students outside the classroom.

Graduation (*sotsugyo shiki*)

At the end of every level of school, there is a graduation ceremony. Those at junior and senior high level are extremely formal affairs, with local dignitaries invited to attend and everyone (parents and teachers) in their best suits or kimonos. There are several practice runs before the actual event, with emphasis on the degree to which students should bow and how they should sit. On the day itself, there are speeches from the principal and a student and the graduation certificates are given out. Towards the end, as a thank you speech is given to teachers and parents by a student, the handkerchiefs begin to dab at moist eyes. At the end, the school song and Auld Lang Syne may be sung. A memorial photograph is taken and then the rest of the school often make a long line, giving presents and best wishes to those who are leaving. Teachers and the parents of the graduating students may then adjourn to an *enkai*. These events usually take place on set days in March. Your attendance may also be required. As school gymnasiums can be very cold this time of year, make sure you are warmly dressed. Formal attire is required for teachers.

Entrance Ceremony (*nyugaku shiki*)

Similar in style to the graduation ceremony, this takes place at the very beginning of the school year in early-April. Teachers usually wear their best suits or kimonos.

AFTER HOURS

Work Parties (*enkai*)

Going out and socialising with your colleagues is an important part of Japanese working life. At the workplace, everyone is busy and takes great pains to be polite to each other and to go about things in the expected way. After hours, while out drinking with colleagues however, the same reserved, polite workers lose their inhibitions and often use the informal atmosphere to their advantage, saying what they really mean and letting others know exactly what they are thinking. The great thing about these parties is that the next day at work things are back to normal, and anything said, done or implied seems to be forgiven, within reason of course. Whereas you should still be careful not to go overboard with the things you say or do, *enkai* are a great way for you and your colleagues to let off steam. Teachers who have never spoken to you before will come up and speak to you and you will often find that you have a larger number of potential friends than you originally

thought. Given the special role that *enkai* play in Japanese working life, you should think twice before declining an invitation. The *enkai* plays an important role in establishing bonds between colleagues.

Enkai Etiquette

When you arrive at the restaurant or hall in which the *enkai* is to take place, do not sit down straight away but wait to be seated by the other teachers. There is a fairly complicated set of rules as to who should sit in which seat and next to whom. As a general rule, those who have high status sit furthest from the door and nearest to the formal decoration. Those with lower status or those who organised the party sit near the door, ready to take care of ordering drinks and so on. In some cases, seating is decided by a lottery-style drawing.

After everyone has decided on who is going to sit where, the speeches start. When someone starts speaking you should sit on your knees, with your legs tucked under you. If you find this too painful at first try to sit discreetly and avoid sitting cross-legged as this is thought of as very informal and particularly inappropriate for women. You should not touch any of the food or drink until the speeches are over, and the toast (*kampai*) is given.

All of a sudden you will see people reaching for the beer and serving those around them. You should never pour for yourself but wait until someone offers some to you. You should lift the glass off the table and hold it with two hands when being served. Similarly you should hold the bottle with both hands when pouring for someone else. If you do not drink but someone offers you some alcohol, it is perfectly acceptable to receive just a drop then lift your glass upwards to get them to stop pouring. When the toast is over, everyone says *kampai* and you can just lift the glass to your lips but not drink and then ask for some oolong tea or iced tea. Make sure that those around you always have full glasses as they will find it too rude to pour for themselves. If someone offers you a drink it is bad manners not to accept, even if you do not intend to drink it. Be careful as it is difficult to know how much you are drinking when others are pouring before you even finish one glass.

Karaoke

Soon after the party gets going, people usually start swapping seats to talk to everyone present. After a fixed amount of time has elapsed, there is another speech and a closing when everyone stands up and claps once at the same time (*ippon-jime*). You will soon get the hang of this. At a usual *enkai* about half of those present go on to a bar for more drinking and maybe some karaoke. There are usually songs in English and a few other languages and you will probably be cajoled into singing at some point. The most important thing to remember is that the quality of singing does not matter, it is rather the fact of giving it a go. If you sing in English or your language at least people will give you the compliment that your pronunciation is good!

A NOTE ABOUT THE HOLIDAYS

The Rules

Before you left your home country you received your terms and conditions for working at your contracting organisation. You were told that by coming to Japan you were showing your agreement with those terms and conditions. The terms and conditions you signed include a certain number of paid holidays that you could take as leave over the course of the year. On arrival in Japan as an ALT, however, you probably found that although you are supposed to be working primarily at schools, there are fairly lengthy periods of time when the students do not have regular classes and you are unable to team-teach. If you work from a board of education this will mean several weeks spent in the office. If you work at a base-school, this will mean several weeks in the staffroom with no students and sometimes few teachers around. Many ALTs want to be able to take this time off, often citing that other teachers do not have to go in. ALTs, however, have to go to their workplace during holidays and the only way an ALT can be absent from the workplace during the term of appointment is to take paid holidays.

What the Other Teachers Do

ALTs who have to go to their workplace during the school holidays often say that they are the only ones present and that all the other teachers do not have to go in. There are a few reasons as to why the other teachers may not be at work. One is that there are often workshops and seminars planned for them during the times when classes are not in session. So, while they are not at the workplace, they are still working on business trips often in different parts of the region. Another possibility is that they are involved with club activities, often teaching the students or taking them on camps or training sessions.

Another possibility is that the teachers may have taken study leave. According to the Article 22 of the Special Act for Education Personnel, Japanese teachers are entitled to take leaves for training purposes. Teachers who do not have any particular duties such as teaching extra classes, club activities or supervising the school premises might take their study leave during the times when students are on holidays. If it is granted (and some prefectures are more strict than others) the teachers are allowed to stay in their homes or somewhere where they can be easily contacted, and study on their own. They are effectively “on call” and so have to go to school should there be an emergency. They are supposed to use the time for study or training and are not allowed to use the time for recreation. They must also submit detailed reports of their studies. However, the CLAIR (proposed) terms and conditions for ALTs does not allow for “study leave.”

How to Use Paid Holidays

Your contracting organisation will expect you to be at work every day you do not take a paid holiday. At quiet times such as during the holidays, you have a good opportunity to plan for future lessons and implement your own projects which will benefit the school or community, or to use the time to study about different teaching methodologies. Another productive way to use the time is to study Japanese, but please ask to make sure this is acceptable. There are a number of excellent textbooks and resource materials which can be used for self-study. Quiet periods such as school holidays are an excellent opportunity for you to take a step back and to re-evaluate your work and to think of ways that you can improve it.

CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF TIME IN SUMMER

T.S. Eliot once wrote “April is the cruellest month”, but then, he never spent August in Japan as a newly-arrived, excited but nervous JET participant. The problem with August is that students are on holiday, and there is no set routine at most schools. Many new JET participants manage to get a great deal of preparation done which they would not otherwise have had time for once the new term begins. Most ALTs, however, will find themselves attending work every day in August, but not being told what they should/could be doing. Here are some ideas for making the most of this time:

- Get to know the staff. Most Japanese people can write their own name in the English alphabet. Since it is a great idea to have a seating chart for your teachers’ room or office anyway, this is a good way of doing it. Draw up a plan of the room and each day, try to talk to two or three people, asking them to write their names (with kanji/hiragana/katakana) for you on the appropriate rectangle.
- Put up that map or those pictures you carted all the way from home – be sure to get permission first. Make some foreign language word lists for the classroom and stick them on the walls. Find an unused stand, and arrange postcards, pictures, etc. from your country on it. If there is a language laboratory, ask someone to show you how it works.
- Study. Set aside a certain amount of time each day in August for studying Japanese. What you study will depend on your level and interests but do not forget to practice what you have learned by speaking to your colleagues.
- Mailboxes. Make a mailbox which can be displayed prominently, and a large poster telling students (and staff, if you like) that you would love to receive letters from them, and that you will reply to all letters. Whether you reply individually, or write a reply and pin it on the

bulletin board, is up to you - but it is a good way of accessing students who would otherwise be too shy to contact you.

- Publications. Making a JTE newsletter is a good idea and a great way of keeping in touch with your JTEs. These can be weekly, but monthly is more realistic, and can include an editorial, cartoons, articles from newspapers from your home country, recipes, letters from JTEs to you, jokes - anything!
- Computers. If you are going to create great newsletters or even great handouts, the ability to use your school or office's computer will really help. August is the time to sit down with someone and be shown the basics; everyone will be too busy later on.
- Talk to your JTEs about your classes. How many will you be teaching? What level are they? Where are they up to in the textbook? What kinds of things did your predecessor do? What topics will be covered in class this term? etc. Do not bombard your JTE with too many questions at once, but find out before you are required to teach. Think ahead and prepare now. Try to think of materials that you could be making now - songs with blanks, board-games, alphabet cards, pictures of people occupied with various activities, weather pattern cards, etc.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Michelle Spezzacatena (Fukushima Prefecture, 2002-05)

Here is a non-exhaustive list of different ways that you can keep yourself busy at school when there are no classes.

Activities involving students

English Bulletin Boards

You can use holidays, your hometown, your country, pop culture, or anything your heart desires. Best bulletin boards often are interactive – pop culture quizzes, sign the board, games, and puzzles. Be creative!

Newsletter for Students

Start an English newsletter for your students. Make it just one page, with easy English. Use lots of pictures to get the students interested before they even read a word. Talk about pop culture from your country, holidays, what you have been doing recently, and anything else your students might be interested in. You can also do a question and answer section. Take some questions that you tend to be asked frequently such as "Can you use chopsticks?" and write out an easy answer for it or ask students what they want to know about you or your hometown/country. Writing the newsletters and getting ideas often does not take long, it is putting it into easy English which takes the most time. Ask one of your JTEs to help you make a word box in Japanese.

E-mail

Set up an e-mail address just for students. Tell them to e-mail you at anytime to ask questions, help with English, or just to chat. At first, some students may be hesitant to write to you, but you may soon have a loyal bunch who write frequently. You can also ask students for their email addresses and send mails to them first.

Lunchtime

Even though it is technically break time for ALTs, eating lunch with the students is both fun and interesting. Many students who are too shy to talk to you in class or in the halls will suddenly open up when you are eating with their group at lunch. Sometimes you will even be asked to join their class for a rousing game of dodge ball during recess.

Club Activities

Do you have an interest in sports or culture? Join a club! This is the time when the students let down their guard the most, especially when their ALT is sweating with them during a game of volleyball. If you have never played that specific sport before, it makes it all the more fun for the students since for once there will be the ones teaching you something. Ask the teachers in charge of the club if you can join, and show your interest in the activities. If they are hesitant at first, keep making an effort and eventually they will come around.

Field Trips

At every school the students go on numerous field trips every year. In junior high school, third graders take a long, overnight trip usually to Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka or another far place. Second graders and first graders usually only take a day trip. They also have sporting events, BBQs, as well as some other fun days that the students really enjoy going to. Since they are out of the classroom the students are much more relaxed. They want to chat with you as much as they can. Of course since there is no teacher breathing down their neck they also might speak more Japanese than English. If you are really lucky then they might actually use more English than Japanese. This is the time to really get to know your students, especially if you have a few schools. If they do not ask you to go, ask your supervisor if you can go.

ALT Journals

This works better for ALTs based at one school or who visit each school for one consecutive week in a month. Buy a notebook. Keep it on your desk during your time away and encourage students and teachers to leave you a message which you will respond to. Tell them if they leave a name you can respond personally, but if they do it anonymously then you will answer in the book. Try and answer the student's questions the first day or two you are back at the school. This shows them that you are very interested in them and they might even write back to you again before you finish your time at that school.

Magazine Library

Subscribe to some cheap teen magazines from home, number them, set up a borrowing policy and let the students loose. Students tend to be excited to see magazines people of the same age read in other countries. Sometimes there will even a waiting list for the popular issues. You can get find great deals for one year international subscriptions.

Cleaning time

Ask if you can have an assigned cleaning place every time you are at a certain school. When you have a specific job, the students help you feel like you belong and they will even help you out in times of need. If you do not have an assigned cleaning place, help out with a different class every day. You can learn even more than your students while sweeping and dusting.

English TV/Radio Broadcasts

Most schools have daily music played before school, during lunch time and during cleaning time. Many times the lunch music is 15 minutes of whatever the students bring in. Ask if you can have your own radio show every week and not only can you play your favorite music, but the students can become internationalised because of it. If they will not give you the whole lunch slot once every week, ask to play one song a week. Give a one or two easy sentence work up about the song and after the song is over do the same. Keep it easy and fun. Ask for requests from students and the songs do not have to be in English. You can use many other languages to promote international understanding.

Extra Lessons

Help students who are having problems learning English quickly or help the graduating students prepare for their tests. Tell teachers that one day a week you will stay late for the sole purpose of helping out students. See if you can get a 'private' room use then, like the library or another teacher's classroom. Tell the students that they can come to ask you for English help for schoolwork, music deciphering, movie understanding, etc. It can also just be a time for them to talk to you. Starting in the late fall, set some time aside for the graduating 3rd graders of junior high

school. Some of them will have to interview in English at a high school. Although they probably go to cram school, many cram schools do not have native English speakers. You can help your students learn how to naturally answer questions. The 3rd grade English teacher should have a list of probable interview questions. Usually the schools do not stray from those questions.

Speech Contests

Most schools will send at least one student to the prefectural speech contest. They can either choose a story from an official English textbook or they can write an original piece. Some areas also do skits, although it is a fairly new concept. Coach students for the prefectural speech contests or make one up for your own school to get more students involved. The earlier you start helping your students out, the better they will do. Some schools pick their speech contest candidates in May or June, so start working with the students to pick a suitable piece for them as well as pronunciation rehearsal.

Writing Contest

Some of the lessons in the textbook could very easily be turned into a contest. There is no need to make the students do extra work. Some students would do a really poor job for a classroom assignment just because it does not excite them. But if you have a prize, most students tend to work harder. After a lesson on writing poems, have students write poems on a nice paper and then encourage them to decorate their final products. Tell them that they will be hung up in the school, judged, and prizes will be awarded. Make up different categories like best artwork, best poem, most creative, funniest, etc. With a little incentive its amazing how much more the students want to work.

Assisting with other subjects/school events/school duties

Ask if you can watch other classes besides English classes. If you have a non-English teacher friend, ask them if you could watch their class. Depending on the school, approval might be needed. If you are lucky, you will be told to just drop in whenever you are free. Go to as many school functions and ceremonies as possible (and when you are there help out a lot!). Help the gardener garden and the tea lady serve tea. It won't take up much time, but it will make a huge difference in relations.

Pen Pals

Set up pen-pals for your students with either a school in your hometown or by finding another JET participant in a different part of Japan who wants to also have pen-pals. The easiest and cheapest way is over email. Put that underutilised computer room to good use.

Label the School in English

Make sure to get permission first... but put up useful English around the school. Label things that students use every day like the toilets, water fountains, black board, etc. Do not only label the normal school items but get creative. Try labeling the portraits hanging on the walls and other items that might also normally be found outside of a school situation. If available, laminate the cards so they can last longer. If students see the words around them so often, they will eventually start to sink in.

Make a video to share with a foreign school

Try and show many aspects of life in a Japanese school. Remember all the quirks that surprised you when you first came to Japan? Get them all on film! Do not forget all the different festivals, fire drills, meetings, ceremonies, and just the normal days too. Not only will it help others learn about life in a Japanese school (like your successor) but it will also be a wonderful keepsake once you leave.

Start an English blog

Make a blog in English about your school or town in Japan or about your school or town back at home. It could be used in two ways. A school in an English-speaking country may find it very useful if they have to learn about Japan. Another way is to have your students use it to practice English or learn about life in your home country. You can put up contests, games, list great music or movies. The only limit is your imagination. If you want to put pictures of your workplace or colleagues on

your blog, ask for their permission beforehand. Privacy is increasingly a very sensitive and serious issue in schools, all of which strictly prohibit putting pictures of their students on the web.

English Clubs

Ask the permission to start an English Club at your school. You can do many of the above mentioned projects as an English club. You can also: Watch Movies, Cook, Throw Holiday parties, Play Communication Games (ex. Charades, Pictionary, Danger! Board Game, Moods Board Game, Scrabble, etc.). Junior high and high school students may only be able to meet once a week or even once a month. If it is really infrequent remember to keep it a lot of fun to ensure that people keep coming back for more.

Start your own club

If there really is not any club that you are interested in joining, consider starting your own club. There are bound to be at least a few students who would want to join your club.

Tips on creating a new club:

- Make extensive plans to present to your supervisor. The better prepared you are, the more likely they will go for the idea.
- New clubs or groups usually require the approval of the Student Council or the Student Advisor. Discuss your plans with them.
- You will need to use *some* Japanese. Have a JTE help you, or prepare instructions beforehand so the JTE can translate it.
- Be creative. The school might not be able to give you all the funds you need right from the beginning. Try to make do with what you have.
- Once you start the club it requires a lot of effort from you to keep the club going. Your students will need various levels of motivating. Also, if you start to show the slightest disinterest, your students will be disappointed. Most kids take their club activity very seriously.

Activities involving teachers

Newsletter for Teachers

This could be either for only English teachers or all the teachers at your school. You could feature grammar points, timely news that is going on back at home, answer questions, talk about holidays, movies, music, etc. Also never underestimate the power of a game. A word search or crossword puzzle may be a welcome break from a hard day. If it is for only English teachers then you should use pretty regular English so they can practice reading normal English. If it is for all teachers, use easier English or have a word box. Some teachers will get completely turned off by too much English and little help.

Eikaiwa (conversation class) for non-English teachers

Do non-English teachers ask you English questions? Start an infrequent *eikaiwa* class. It is possible that only twice or three times a term is enough. It will not only help you make more friends at school, but it will make the teachers feel more comfortable around you. You can ask about their opinions as to what they want to learn or what they have questions about. If no one says anything in particular, make up a fun but informative lesson. Believe it or not but the teachers like to run around just as much as the students do. There is no better way to let off steam.

Teacher's Meetings

Not only will going to meetings help your Japanese improve but it will make the other teachers think that you really want to be a part of the school. Overall it can only improve your relations with the teachers.

Other Activities

Write an article for the town/city newspaper

Most, if not all, towns and cities have newspapers that go out infrequently. Ask if you can write a personal editorial style letter where you can decide what to write. Some ALTs write them quarterly, bimonthly and some even twice a month. If you can get the authorization from your supervisor, it is

a good way to get involved in the community.

Go to another school

If you are told ahead of time that you will not have any classes a certain day, ask if you can visit a local elementary school, kindergarten or preschool that does not have an ALT visit or has an ALT visit infrequently. The request may need to go through your BOE, but once you make a good relationship with the other school you might be able to go there frequently. The children will be very excited to see you and you might become good friends with some of the teachers at the other school too.

Become TESL/TEFL Certified

There are many programs that enable you to be TESL or TEFL certified through either online courses or distance learning. There are all different lengths, specialties, and costs for the classes. You will learn many important skills that can be put towards your job and will be able to apply what you are learning into the classroom in real-time before you even finish the course.

Join AJET or your local JET organisation

One way to bring happiness to all the JETs in your prefecture is to volunteer for your local chapter of AJET to host parties and other exciting events. This is an easy way to get involved in the JET community. The more people that help out, the more fun everyone has.

Write for (or start) your prefecture's newsletter

A JET newsletter can definitely bring joy to a quiet day of work. Submit original works, find jokes on the Internet, find news articles which might be of interest to a lot of JET participants, tell about what happened to you at your last *enkai*, submit your great lesson ideas, or write an advice column or horoscopes. There are a million creative ways to add to your already existing newsletters. If your prefecture does not already have a newsletter, start one. You can start out with sometimes that only a few pages long of all your submissions, but eventually it will take off. Ask other JET participants for submissions and compile them all yourself. Your local JET association or prefectural office may be able to assist you with building an emailing list.

EXPECTATIONS

This is a personal essay describing the way one ALT came to understand her job.

It is hard to say what made my year as an ALT so special. It certainly was not what I expected and I had to work hard to adjust my expectations and get a larger view of what I could achieve for myself and for the benefit of the school.

My initial appraisal of my situation was that I was being hopelessly underused at school and my supervisor and principal were wasting a wonderful opportunity for me to teach the students English and to expose them to another culture. I thought the JET Programme was all about internationalisation and I could not reconcile my school's underuse of me with my own lofty ideals of how to make Japan international. At times I got frustrated at having some of my more ambitious ideas and plans rebuffed. Gradually, however, I came to a more realistic view of my work. I realised that I could not be a crusader for international understanding; that I had a lot to learn myself about foreign cultures before I was in any position to be teaching others. Even in my English classes I had a lot to learn about what the students and the teachers had as their aims and that that had to be the focus of any team-taught class. Without the support of every person in the classroom, no activities were going to work.

In real terms this did mean giving up some of my ideas, but a lot of them could be salvaged by using a different approach to getting them approved. A lot of it depended on trust. I had to listen to my JTEs and take what they were saying on board. I think the real key to getting support for my ideas was being seen to listen to others and work together with my Japanese counterpart. Over time my colleagues seemed to warm to my efforts and it got to the point where they would occasionally

approach me to ask for my opinions. In retrospect I think that this only happened because they came to trust that I was reasonable and not dogmatic about my views.

Another way in which I think my work was improved was that I realised that I really did get out as much as I put in. Like the students and they will like you. When the teachers see you getting on with the students and showing a genuine interest in them, they will be impressed and see the benefit of having you around. Most of them never had a foreign teacher to teach them English and wish they had. A large part of my role in the school centred around the things I could do with the students outside the classroom. Even in the teachers' room I tried to help out as much as possible and show myself to be personable. A lot of this job really is about human relations.

Spending so much of my time thinking about general school activities was not what I came to Japan for, and looking back I suppose I did find it frustrating at times. Most of the time though, I really enjoyed being able to be creative about my job and was constantly thinking up new ways of making my stay more productive. I had to get away from the idea that I came on the JET Programme with a mission and that the way to fulfill that mission was already laid in stone. I had to think for myself, learn to be self-reliant to some extent and think around problems that were presented to me. It was a great experience for learning about my personal skills and developing them.

After all that I also felt that my teaching improved and that I could impart some of my knowledge to the students and teachers. Teaching Japanese students was different from any teaching experience I had had in the past and it was a skill that I had to study and learn about. I think you should not come on the Programme thinking you know what is best for your school and students. It is something that you have to think long and hard about and use your growing experience to constantly improve your skills. The JET Programme is an exchange of teaching and learning. Your students are not the only ones who have something to gain.

BURN OUT

The combination of living in a new and unfamiliar environment, an entirely new circle of friends and acquaintances, and a new job making heavy demands on you can be exhausting. Burn out refers to the specifically work-related part of this burden, and is something that many ALTs deal with. There is a real and often elusive paradox to recognising, understanding, and remedying burn out. While going through the early stages, fuel is often added to the fire before we realise what is happening. Your life and work as an ALT will put you in line for some heavy doses of stress at times, and it is vital for you to be able to recognise and deal with this as it occurs.

Make the time to step back periodically and take a good hard look at yourself and your job. Note what gives you pleasure and what causes anxiety or frustration. There are many signs of burn out, including excessive homesickness, excessive sleep, boredom, irritability, lack of appetite, stereotyping of host nationals, and overreacting to disruptive students.

Communication

Be yourself. Let your colleagues see that you can and want to fit in. If they are uptight at first, try to get them to relax a little. Tell jokes.

If you have a work-related problem present it at the appropriate time and after you have thought it through. It is of the utmost importance to keep the focus on the problem, and not the person. Try to establish a regular time where you can update them on your activities, ideas, and problems. In some offices, your supervisor might want you to refer all your problems or questions to him/her. However, your supervisor may not be responsible for all matters, and may refer you to the person who manages the affairs for things like apartment issues, rent, or use of holidays. Also, if at all possible, go out for dinner (or drinks) together at least once with your supervisor. You are likely to find him/her a completely different person in a more relaxed setting.

Colleagues

Try to be friendly and approachable with everyone at work. Colleagues can often explain the inner workings of your school or office and help you to understand your colleagues better. Try to join colleagues for lunch regularly, or for an after-school coffee break. When you have a question or request, ask colleagues that you know or trust; bounce your ideas off them and ask them how you think they would be received before going public or making an official request. In what is inevitably a situation with a potential for isolation, you need to consciously build a support network both in your personal life and at work. Having good relationships with colleagues is a cliché of internationalisation, but it can also be the difference between having stressful relationships and an enjoyable experience.

Situation Evaluation

Do you know and regularly talk to a native speaker of your own language? Are you overwhelmed by too much Japanese? Or do you have the opposite problem: are you surrounded by other foreigners? Do you want to learn Japanese but have no one to practice with? Establish new ties away from education. When things start to seem really bad, take a minute to think about other possibilities; ask yourself “What would I be doing right now if I were back in my native environment, and what would I be missing about Japan?” The most important thing is to get a perspective on your situation, which may mean talking to somebody else about it.

Adjust Your Expectations

Due to language and other barriers, we cannot realistically expect to achieve as much in a given amount of time as we could in our native environment. Do not overwork yourself or constantly haunt your conscience with a barrage of “I should do this” and “I should have done that”. Do what you can and do not worry about what you cannot do. Keep a check on your expectations, and work on making steady progress.

You will have bad days. However, if they occur more than once or twice a month, sit down and examine the situation. Is there something common to all the bad days? A heavy schedule can be both physically and mentally draining. The following are a few suggestions for coping with frustration and fatigue:

- Establish contact with other ALTs with whom you can vent.
- Sleep! Try to avoid the tendency to feel guilty about turning down social invitations from time to time. Keep in mind that your Japanese friends and colleagues might not fully realise the demands made on your time.
- Call in reinforcements if necessary. If your supervisor seems unreasonable in over-scheduling you to the point of exhaustion, seek outside help. If your supervisor is not receptive to this, or if the situation is not good in general, consult another ALT (preferably the Prefectural Advisor or a reappointed JET participant) or CLAIR for advice.
- Keep in mind that your time as a JET participant is limited and try to focus on reasonable solutions. You can move on after a year. Look at things in smaller portions.

Finally, take things slowly. You may have come to Japan with big ideas and big projects in mind, but you should first focus your efforts on learning about and understanding your working environment. After you further build trust and respect from your colleagues, it will be easier for you to gradually start trying to introduce your projects and ideas, little by little.

JET SUPPORT SYSTEM

One of the things that really helps make the JET Programme strong is the support made available to JET participants. You can find more detailed information on the support system in your General Information Handbook (GIH). Basically, the support system in place for JET participants is designed to offer assistance to you when you are unable to handle an issue yourself, by starting with the person closest to you and working outwards until you are able to get the information you need to

help you solve your own problem.

CLAIR Publications

If you experience any problems as a JET participant, first try to find the information you need to resolve the problem on your own. The ALT Handbook, the GIH, JET Programme website, CLAIR News, JET forums and other CLAIR publications might just have the information that you are looking for.

Your Supervisor

If you do not find the information you are looking for, try talking to a colleague at school or your supervisor in your contracting organisation. Your supervisor should be one of your first points of contact in trying to resolve issues you may have while on the programme. Your supervisor will know your employment and living situation and will try to assist you.

Prefectural Advisor

In the case your supervisor cannot help you resolve your problem, you may wish to speak to your Prefectural Advisor, or PA for short. Prefectural Advisor (PA) system is in place in order to provide a local support network for JET participants in Japan. In most prefectures, there is at least one current JET participant and one Japanese staff member serving as PAs. PAs attend two conferences in Tokyo during the JET year where they receive training and advice about counselling techniques. PAs are not professional counselors, but can help you find information on professional counsellors if necessary. PAs also have knowledge or access to information about the JET Programme, recommended terms and conditions and the implementation of the JET Programme in your local area, as well as general information about life in Japan and work as an ALT. PAs are usually ALTs or CIRs who work at boards of education or at the International Affairs Division at the prefectural office, so check to find out how you can contact your PA after you arrive in your prefecture. If you are unsure who your PA is, CLAIR will be happy to point you in the right direction via the JET Line. Just keep in mind that your PA is not there to solve your problem for you, but to help you solve the issue on your own .

CLAIR Programme Coordinators

Talking to friends and colleagues can be a great help, but sometimes it can be a good idea to talk to somebody who is outside your situation and can be more objective. If you feel that this could help you at all, call a CLAIR Programme Coordinator (PC). All PCs are former JET participants and have an understanding of your situation based on having been through their own “encounters” with life and work in Japan. When you call CLAIR, PCs can listen and advise if needed and will not automatically take yours or the employer’s side: we are a neutral third party. All calls, whether work-related or personal are confidential.

PSG

Another source of support is the Peer Support Group (PSG), which is a night time phone listening and information service administered by National AJET. PSG is an independent, self-supporting volunteer organisation that represents JET participants.

TELL

Another telephone service known as the Tokyo English Life Line (TELL) is available to all English speaking foreign residents in Japan, not only JET participants.

Other JET Participants

In addition to your family and friends back home, and the formal framework of the JET Programme support system, the JET community in your prefecture is, of course, another great source of support. Some of you may be thinking “I didn’t come to Japan to meet other foreigners,” but we encourage you to meet and network with other JET participants at welcome events and local

teaching resources, you can learn from each other's experiences. Other ALTs will often relate to your work concerns better than anyone else, since they may have encountered the same situation.

Team Teaching & Classroom Management

Life After the B.O.E.

BY DAVID KAMISATO (GARDNER-REEL, CR. 2002-04)



Always be prepared.

TEAM TEACHING

ALTs participate in team teaching. The goal of team teaching is to create a foreign language classroom in which the students, the Japanese teacher of the foreign language (JTE) and the native speaker (ALT) engage in communicative activities. Team teaching provides opportunities for active interaction in a foreign language in the classroom, enhances the students' motivation towards learning a foreign language and deepens the students' understanding of foreign cultures. ALTs are involved with the planning of lessons in cooperation with Japanese foreign language teachers, interacting jointly with the Japanese teacher in the classroom and evaluating the effectiveness of the lessons.

Please bear in mind that, in the classroom, the ALT team-teaches with the Japanese teacher. The ALT should not be expected to conduct classes alone, or be the "main" teacher. ALTs must respect the syllabus requirements and wishes of the Japanese teacher during lesson planning sessions. It is useful to remember that most ALTs begin their duties at the beginning of the second term, so the curriculum may already have been planned. However, ALTs are a valuable resource for JTEs, and should suggest activities or creative and effective ways to use the authorised textbook. Also, despite being given the title assistant, many ALTs are given a great deal of responsibility regarding the curricula and syllabi.

The presence of an ALT has many benefits for the students and the JTE. ALTs are uniquely equipped to engage in communicative education. ALTs can make foreign language learning more immediate and real for the students. They can speak from personal experience about a foreign culture, and breathe new life into a text by building upon it with these experiences. He or she can also help to improve the JTEs' language ability, confidence and teaching skills, and provide JTEs with the opportunity to speak with native speakers. It is through team teaching with the JTE that the influence of the ALT can reach the greatest number of students, not just that particular year, but for as long as the JTE teaches.

Also, the ALT, having been exposed to a different educational system than the JTE, may have been exposed to alternative ways of instruction, which he or she can use alongside the more traditional teaching methods. The close contact that is possible between the ALT and the JTE allows for a worthwhile exchange of ideas between the two. Working together, they can combine their knowledge and experience to produce more productive teaching techniques than they could not otherwise create on their own.

It is difficult to generalise about the ALT position. ALTs may work closely with Japanese colleagues in developing the curriculum and be given the responsibility to develop their own materials, or their Japanese colleagues may have already decided an overall plan. Whatever the case, it is important for ALTs to talk with their colleagues at the beginning to establish the goals and objectives for team teaching lessons. In the course of their duties, ALTs will have the opportunity to teach with a number of teachers who have different teaching styles and personalities. The development of good working relationships between ALTs and JTEs will be one of the biggest challenges and one of the most rewarding aspects of life as a JET participant. Good cooperation between the ALT and the JTE has a major influence on the atmosphere of the classroom and on the students' attitudes towards team teaching lessons and communicating in a foreign language.

The value of team teaching, however, extends beyond the specific lesson that is team-taught. In a larger sense, team teaching is a medium through which the ALT can demonstrate many broader educational principles that the JTE can employ everyday (without the ALT) to increase the effectiveness of his or her teaching. Based on the experiences of past ALTs all over Japan, the following are some principles that are widely applicable and very helpful. This list is not exhaustive, nor is it arranged in any special order of importance. Rather, it represents ALTs' most frequent suggestions for the improvement of language education.

Teach All Four Components of Language

Language is composed of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. To achieve communicative competence, one must practise all four. Indeed, the learning of a language is easier if they are combined. If only reading and writing are taught, the students' progress is actually impeded.

Placing greater stress on the listening and speaking components of language will facilitate the students' mastery of the material, improve their test scores, and make class more interesting.

Challenge the Students to Think

Find ways to challenge the students without embarrassing them. By immediately showing the Japanese meanings of words or by translating everything into Japanese, you run the risk of the students becoming intellectually passive. In some cases the students may prefer to wait for an answer or the JTE's translation instead of actively trying to understand something by themselves. However, in most cases the students probably are thinking, but may find it difficult to express exactly what they mean in the foreign language. Be patient, and try to encourage them as much as possible.

Build on Past Knowledge

If the students do not really understand earlier lessons their linguistic foundation will not be sound, and they will not be able to master subsequent information. The teacher should therefore check for comprehension rather than assuming his or her explanation was sufficient. Moreover, past material is less likely to be forgotten if it is incorporated into later lessons. It is also important that the teacher show the relation of the new material to the old; without the understanding of this relationship, the students are overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of seemingly unrelated bits of information.

Cultivate a Relaxed Classroom

Learning a foreign language is a frustrating and humbling experience, so it is quite natural that some students dislike it. As well as fear of failure some students are afraid of classmates' opinions. Combat these feelings through non-traditional teaching methods that relax the class, such as language games, TPR (Total Physical Response) activities and an overt display of enthusiasm. A fun class sparks the students' interest and makes them more receptive to learning. This does not mean the teacher has to be a comedian or a circus performer, but only that he or she should show interest in the students and in making the lesson special for them.

Make the Lessons Relevant

Lessons directly relevant to the students increase the students' interest in and ability to recall the material. The most powerful lesson is about something that the students both know and like. Demonstrate grammar points using real things, not just the examples in the textbook. This serves not only to make the lesson more interesting and memorable, but it also shows how to generalise from the text's limited examples to create real communicative and meaningful language. A few suggestions would be cartoon characters, movie stars, singers, sports, name brands, or whatever is popular at the moment. You might buy teen magazines or ask your students about these ideas. They will tell you what to be on the lookout for!

Speak in Your Native Language as Much as Possible

The simplicity of this principle belies its importance. It is perhaps the most significant way to improve effectiveness because its benefits are so numerous. It is a convincing demonstration that a foreign language is a real language that can be used for communication. It helps to consolidate old material and preview upcoming material. It gives the students daily listening comprehension practice. It shows how to generalise from the text, how to create original sentences that express new ideas. Finally, on the most basic level, speaking in your native language maximises the students' exposure to it and therefore maximises the probability that they will learn something. Japanese should be avoided in the classroom whenever possible, and many ALTs may be asked to never speak it in the classroom.

SUGGESTIONS FOR A COMFORTABLE CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE

The Classroom Pace Should Be Fast

There is a very high correlation between high student test scores, long term retention, and high active student response rates. Try to discipline yourself never to go longer than three minutes without some kind of student response, and try to get as many student responses as you can in one class period. Maintain a lively pace. Do not stay on one activity for too long. Think about the students' concentration span.

Students Should Feel Comfortable Making Mistakes

The teacher's attitude and the atmosphere he or she sets in class is very important. Teachers must constantly encourage participation without fear. This is very important. The ALT and JTE must help students to overcome their natural fear of making mistakes. Give lots of positive encouragement and verbally reward students when they answer correctly. Do not laugh at the mistakes that your students make; instead look in their eyes and give an encouraging smile or nod to let them know you are cheering them on. Give them helpful hints, but do not correct them every time they make a mistake. They need to feel confident enough to speak in the foreign language, and correcting every mistake does not build confidence. A few suggestions are:

1. Find something positive in the student's answer even if it is wrong.
2. Consider the fact that students' levels are different, so an incomplete answer may be a big achievement for one student and worthy of encouragement.
3. Do not repeat the student's answer as if you need to authenticate it. If necessary, ask the student to repeat it in a louder voice.
4. Ask easy questions to less able students to give them confidence.

You Should Honestly Seem to Enjoy Teaching

Exhibit interest in the language that you are teaching and be enthusiastic in the classroom. Try to be relaxed and confident in class. Do not nail yourself to the front of the classroom. Move around the room while you teach and do not be dissuaded from doing this by the students' (or other teacher's) surprise. The students can usually tell if you are enjoying being with them and sharing your language with them. If you do not feel comfortable teaching then chances are the students and JTE will not feel comfortable either. Enjoying teaching and feeling comfortable in the classroom definitely helps to create a responsive class. Even if you do not enjoy the activity you are doing, be bright and cheerful and your attitude will wear off.

Use Pair work and Group work Activities

Introducing pair work may take time, but your students will get used to it. Simple mathematics shows that pair and group activities are by far the most efficient way of using class time. When they are doing group work, move around the room to ensure they are practicing correctly.

Be Prepared for Cultural Differences

The culture of the Japanese classroom may be quite different from your home country's classroom culture. This does not mean that it is bad or strange, just different. The students must get used to you and you must get used to them. You may find the first year junior high school students overwhelmingly friendly, whereas the third year high school students may appear to be completely bored by your lessons. In the past, Japanese culture has not necessarily promoted individualism, therefore some students may find it difficult to answer a question without making certain that the rest of the class or group is in approval of the answer. You may be explaining something and receive no nods of comprehension or any sign that they have comprehended. Most of the time the students merely do not want to be the only one to nod their head. It is also acceptable in the classroom to confer with the students around them for the answer to a question. Most of the time the student knows the correct

answer, but searches for approval from classmates before answering. This is part of the culture and may need some serious consideration before criticising. The culture of a Japanese classroom is something that you must take the time to understand.

Try to Make the Students Less Dependent on Their Books

Many students believe that the answer to any question is in their textbook. This may be true for many subjects, but language is not one of them. The textbook contains many good examples to learn from, but as far as the correct answer to an oral question is concerned they may be looking in the wrong place. Creativity and personal experience helps in language learning. Encourage them to give their own answers. You may ask questions that require individual answers, but without embarrassing the students. Help them not to be ruled by the textbooks, but understand the cultural importance of them. Asking some questions that are in the textbook can raise confidence. Less able students may get well-needed confidence from relying on the textbook. If your lesson is extremely different from normal it may be frightening for some students.

Make It Fun

Whether you are bound to a particular textbook or not, you should be able to make the most of your “living English” and incorporate ideas into the lessons. Find out what interests the students. Most students are interested in music and Japanese teen idols. Some are interested in sports, motorcycles or fashion. Try to use these interests in class, in English. Look at the magazines and comics the students read. Some magazines have a lot of information about teen idols, the latest music, and posters. Use the posters in class. The students will pay more attention if the lesson is about Lady Gaga and Justin Bieber rather than Kevin and Mary. Make flash cards and pictures for your lesson. Do not be shy about acting or drawing on the board.

A CRASH COURSE IN LESSON PLANNING

Bryan Darr (Saitama Prefecture, 2008-13)

Great lessons start with good planning and end with good classroom management. Whether you are just starting out and constantly asking yourself “What am I doing next period?” or looking to improve the flow and effectiveness of your current lessons, everyone benefits from taking a look at new ideas. What follows is a combination of information from the JET Programme Japanese Language Course- Linguistics and Pedagogy Course, the book [Teach Like a Champion](#) by Doug Lemov, the National Capital Language Resource Center’s “Essentials of Language Teaching” website, and five years of JET ALT experience at elementary, junior high and high schools, as well as English camps and visits to special-needs schools. We will start by discussing the basic structure of a lesson, then move on to create one, and finally some free (and probably worth every yen) advice.

Three Ways to Understand Lesson Structure

Students love structure. They like knowing what to do, how to succeed, what is coming next – and as a teacher, you can use this to your advantage. There are many ways to structure lessons, and while most follow a similar pattern, it is helpful to see how different experts express it. First we will cover a conceptual way to look at lesson structure from [Teach Like a Champion](#), then a concrete format from the JET Programme Japanese Language Course- Linguistics and Pedagogy Course, and finally a specialised reading/writing class structure from TEFL.

I–We–You from [Teach Like a Champion](#)

First I demonstrate, then we do together, then you do by yourself. This concept ensures that students are not sent off to do the work by themselves before they have mastered practicing it

with the teachers, and lends itself well to a variety of subjects and grade levels. Not only does it cover the entire structure of a lesson, but it also applies to each concept taught during the lesson.

For the “I” portion of a lesson, you and the JTE start by drawing the students into the lesson, perhaps with a story or explaining how useful the lesson information will be. You then give them the language tools they will need to accomplish your lesson’s goal – vocabulary, grammatical structures – often by breaking down the process into manageable steps. It is very important that you both properly model what the students are expected to learn and explain what they are learning, particularly within the greater context of your curriculum or even life. This is also not a place to forego student interaction – you can ask plenty of questions to keep the class engaged. Finally, the more practice you get as a teacher, the better you will be at anticipating student misunderstandings and questions during this phase of the lesson, helping make the introduction and presentation of material much smoother.

Moving on to the “We” portion of a lesson, you start bringing students into the process of language production. First you could model the dialogue with the JTE, then a student, and then change roles to have them ask you questions. During this phase it is very important to allow the students to think through the process, allowing them to do most of the cognitive legwork. Questions such as “What comes next?” and “How can this be more polite?” will help you gauge what the students still do not understand, and positive reinforcement will encourage students to make mistakes and think of the answers on their own.

The “You” portion is typically the climax of the class or lesson section, when students go off to do the work in pairs or groups, and where they get the very important elements of repetition, independence, and multiple scenarios. By having the students practise numerous times, in various situations, and with each other, they will retain the information better, as well as be able to recall it in a variety of situations. It will also give the students much more practice than one teacher is able to provide.

So that is the idea behind I–We–You. Now let us look at this in a concrete linear structure: Introduction > Provide Information > Practice > Conclusion from the JET Programme Japanese Language Course– Linguistics and Pedagogy course. In the world of TEFL, this is called Presentation, Practice, Use (PPU).

Introduction

During the introduction of the lesson, you handle administrative tasks, develop a positive learning environment, and confirm the purpose of the lesson. Administrative tasks are pretty straightforward: take attendance, collect homework, and announce any upcoming events. Developing a positive learning environment comes next, and is a very important and often undervalued portion of the lesson. Presentation experts say that you lose your audience within the first five minutes, and the same holds true for lessons. You can build a positive environment by starting with a story, a “problem of the day” writing exercise, a warm-up conversation activity, a short discussion, photographs or other realia, referencing a previous lesson, or any combination thereof. Then, at the end of the introduction phase, you will confirm the purpose of today’s lesson. This can be done in conjunction with developing a positive environment, and is often served by writing the day’s objective on the board and referring to it.

Provide Information

This is where the bulk of teaching happens, and the most teacher-oriented part of the lesson. Let us start by imagining the information you want your students to know as Russian nesting dolls. The largest doll is the first piece of information, the next smaller doll is the next piece of information, etc. Each piece builds on the previous one, encompassing it plus some new information. Or, in other words: A is introduced. B is introduced. A and B are practised together. C is introduced. A, B, C are used and practised together. Just be sure to never introduce more than one piece of information at a time.

It is very important to think about what order to present the information. You could order it easiest to hardest (concrete to abstract, general to specific, high frequency to low frequency, rules to exceptions, clear standpoints to uncertain standpoints), simple to complicated (short words to long words and expressions, simple conjugations to difficult ones, sentences with just a subject and verb to more complex sentences), known information to unknown information, common in English and Japanese to uncommon, and non-essential to the day's main activity to essential. If you are doing a shopping exercise, for example, "How may I help you?" would come after a review of numbers and items to buy. How you order your information has a big impact on student understanding.

Practice

Practice is the key to language acquisition, and is what makes the difference between a lecture and a lesson. Try to not think of it as just one part of the lesson— it is important to break up instruction with frequent practice opportunities. In fact, practise everything learned immediately after it is introduced, no matter how small— even if it is just: "Repeat after me." Two strong forms of practice are dialogues and question-answer sessions. They reflect real life and prevent your lessons from becoming exercises in rote memorisation for the sake of you looking like a teacher. For example, instead of having students just repeat colours, teach them how to ask each other for their favorite colour. And because there are many types of questions (yes/no, interrogative, permission, invitations, etc.) you will have plenty to go on. You might also consider the attention span of your students when planning activities. Many students cannot focus on one task or more than 10 minutes, much less 30. Therefore, frequent changes in activities and pace will keep your lessons lively and productive.

Now that each piece of information is armed with its own opportunity for practice, you can take chunks of information and turn them into mini-activities with two or three utterances, such as the aforementioned dialogues. After a few mini-activities, you can move on to a larger performance – role plays, tasks, games. With these larger activities, it is important to focus on conversation flow and communication, and less on grammatical accuracy which would have been covered during prior, smaller practices. This will encourage students to make mistakes, as well as interact with their classmates comfortably and frequently. It also greatly increases the amount of practice they receive – you cannot practise with every student one-on-one, so they need to work with each other. Role-plays can include cultural components and props; games can cover bingo, memory, telephone, races, etc. Competition is also a fun way to draw your students into the practice.

Conclusion

Finally, at the end of class you will confirm what the students have learned (perhaps with quick review questions), communicate any important messages, take care of any administrative details, and reset the classroom for the next lesson.

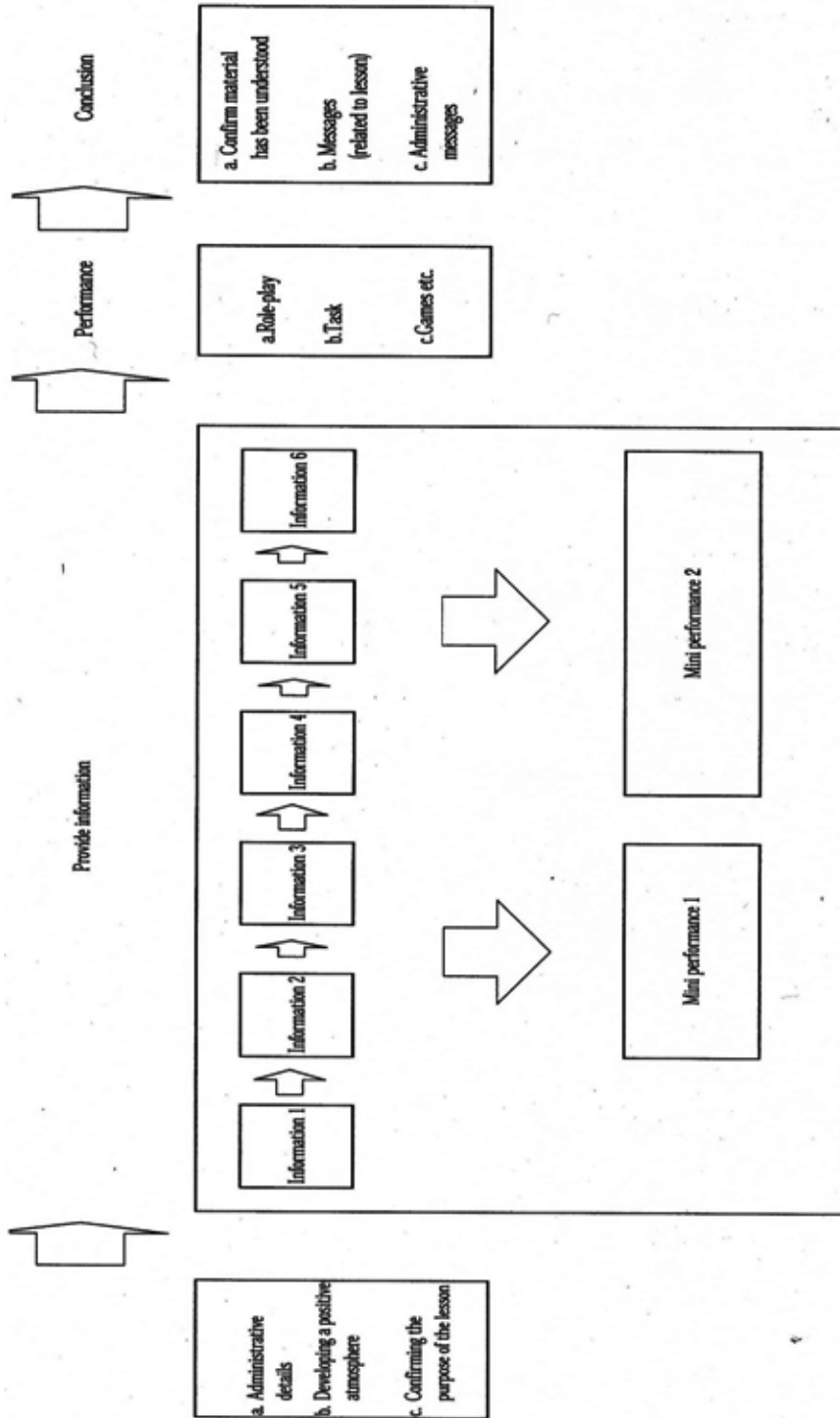


Figure 1: Overall flow of the lesson. Source: Maruyama, Keisuke (2005). *JET shonen no tame ni nihongo no oshiekata* (Teaching Japanese for JET participants). JET Programme Japanese Language Course- Linguistics and Pedagogy Course: CLAIR.

Reading/Writing Classes

The last way to conceptualise lesson flow is unique to reading and writing classes. If you are teaching reading or writing, even for one lesson in your overall syllabus, the aforementioned ideas still apply. But the format looks a bit different. Your information will be skills or strategies for reading or writing, but your activities will be very structured differently. In TEFL, they are called Pre-While-Post activities (PWP). Basically, you have activities to prepare the students for reading or writing, activities to do while the students are reading or writing, and activities at the end to process what they read or wrote.

Pre-activities often include group discussions and front-loading students with information relevant to the material. Questions to ask yourself while planning such a discussion include: What are the themes? What do the students already know? What should they know about the style? What should they be preparing to practice? How can I prepare my students to understand? Do I need to provide vocabulary lists? Should they research words themselves ahead of time? Can they predict?

While-activities keep students on track and focused on the main objective, and include things such as highlighting while reading and using the writing process. Questions to ask yourself include: How can they implement and use their strategies? Will this involve notes, charts, and activities? Do they need to look up words now or later? Should they circle or underline new or familiar forms? Will they need paper?

Post-activities include sharing information in groups, comparing pictures, retelling, etc. Will they make a poster? Do a play? Fill out a form? Have a discussion? What language do the students need to learn to discuss the text?

“Real life” activities are just as important here as is in communication lessons. If your students are reading for pleasure, a test at the end is inappropriate, but a discussion on the plot and characters would be very germane. If your students are reading a menu, they probably do not need to understand everything on it. In this case, questions such as “You have \$10. Can you afford to eat here?” and “What will you order?” would be appropriate. This applies to while-activities, too. Reading out loud, for example, is highly complex process that is unhelpful for all but advanced students. If there is an error, you will not know if it is due to misinterpreting pronunciation, misunderstanding a word, or misunderstanding an entire concept. Furthermore, unless they are in a teaching situation, most people do not read loud in real life. A better and more realistic method would be to have your students read a passage many times, consider the content, and then look up and summarise without looking back at the text.

How to Plan a Lesson

Now that we know the general flow of a lesson, let us look at how to plan one. When you are first learning how to teach, it is very easy to fall into the trap of planning a worksheet or a game before thinking about what to teach your students. Unfortunately, this ultimately wastes time as you go back to revise details as the plan develops. Even worse is when you make a worksheet but later realise that the content does not match what you were supposed to teach. Thus, it is vital to create your lessons by starting with the big picture and working down to the details. The best way to do this is to start with an overarching objective for a group of lessons, then plan individual lessons to fit that objective, and then plan the details of those lessons. Ideally your lessons will fit into the grand scheme of the curriculum, as determined by the textbook, the guidelines set down by MEXT, your schools, and your particular goals. To accomplish that, feel free to ask your JTE about their desires for the class, too. However, as many ALTs will not be able to plan multiple sequential lessons, we will look at the process for creating a single lesson. That process is:

1. Set a specific objective
2. Decide on the information to present
3. Plan the lesson flow
4. Fill in the details
5. Make the materials

Setting Objectives

Before you do anything else in a lesson— make a handout, plan an activity, or consider grammar points, set a lesson objective. Not only will this save you time re-doing worksheets and plans, it will make your lessons concise and orderly. You can even write your objective on the board each day so that your students will know what the purpose of your lesson is. Specifically, the objective is what you want your students to know or be able to do by the end of class. This is a measurable question to ask yourself, whereas “What will my students do today?” is not.

As with personal goals, lesson objectives need to be explicit, measurable, achievable, and relevant to the needs of the student. “Students can live in the US,” “Students can live in Chicago,” “Students can get around Chicago,” and “Students can use the CTA (Chicago public transportation),” are all too broad. “Students can purchase a CTA pass at a convenience store using ‘I would like to buy a one-month pass,’ ‘How much is it’ and ‘Can I pay with a credit card;’ is a much better place to start. Or, if you are looking at a cultural lesson, rather than “Students will appreciate British history,” try “Students will learn four things about the holiday Burns Night.”

Deciding on Information

Once you have your objective, consider what items you need to teach to achieve that goal. If your lesson revolves around shopping, your teachable material could include times, numbers, prices, this/that, place names, greetings, intention, and various nouns and verbs. Only some of those will be coverable in a single period, though. If you are using a textbook, you will need to be familiar not only with the chapter you are teaching, but also all prior chapters to know what the students have already covered. You will also need to check if the textbook grammar and vocabulary are those that you want to use in your lesson. Even if your text is very well organised, there will likely be some phrases that your students will need that are not included in the chapter.

Planning the Lesson Flow

Once you have decided on what to teach, it is time write out the flow of the lesson from introduction to conclusion. This is where all that work of deciding what order to teach things comes into play.

Filling in the Details

Now you can finally ask yourself, “How do I want to teach this information?” It is important at this phase to include practical exercises, and to keep in mind the different ways in which students learn. Will you use close (fill-in-the-blank) activities, dialogues, writing practice, games, drawing? If you are giving homework, will it be writing, practicing, listening to a tape, or memorising a dialogue? To ensure high interest, ask yourself, “Are these activities interesting to me/can I do these?” Also remember that the shortest path to your goal is the best— you do not have to include all of the fanciest methods or activities to get the information across. And do not forget to include some sort of assessment to see that your objective was met. This assessment does not necessarily have to be a quiz, homework, or a poster. It could be as simple as a question asked to each student on the way out of class.

When you write your plan, include things you will need to know during the lesson. Do not wait until mid-class to think of example sentences or probing questions. And do not worry about looking at your notes. You still look more prepared than if you were fumbling for ideas. As you grow as a teacher, you will find many activities and management methods that work particularly well. Trial and error, reading books on teaching methods, watching other teacher’s lessons, and recording your own for later review will all give you insight into which methods work the best. In addition, be sure to reflect on your lessons once you are finished. Try to make a few notes in a journal or on your plan about what you could modify or change to improve next time, what factors could have contributed to success or failure, or what went

particularly well. Do not simply walk away from a lesson, whether it was good or bad. You will thank yourself later.

Making your Materials

Finally, you can make the materials for class. Flashcards, worksheets, pictures, signs, and especially realia are all great ways to boost interest and save valuable class time instead of writing everything on the board. Your students will notice the effort you put into your materials, so try to give yourself enough time to do them the courtesy of giving your best. If you do find yourself without enough time to make materials, at least give some forethought to what you will write on the board, and how you will arrange it for clarity.

Some Tricks of the Trade

Finally, here are a few tricks I have learned about lesson planning along the way.

As ALTs are team-teaching with JTEs, be sure to collaborate with them during the planning process, as well as in the classroom. JTEs have a distinct advantage over most non-natives in understanding Japanese students, their learning methods and abilities, and English acquisition. In the classroom, this sort of collaboration manifests with open and respectful communication in English as the lesson progresses. Not only will this create a more harmonious workplace which your students will pick up on, but it will present the JTE as a confident and competent Japanese speaker of English— a role model that is sometimes missing in the classroom narrative, and one that your students will benefit from having.

Do not be afraid to write long lessons. A lesson on numbers could be a page and take one class, while a lesson on conditionals could take four or five and run a week or more. You can stop anywhere and continue on the next time, and having extra activities will make you calmer and feel less inclined to draw out the activities beyond their enjoyable length. Furthermore, do not worry if you do not finish your lesson. You can always pick up where you left off later, and rushing will only lead to confusion and inadequate practice.

There is no perfect format, so find what works best for you by looking at many different lesson plans. I find a grid system that includes what I am teaching, what I will tell the students, and what materials I need for each section to be very helpful. Although when I am first planning a lesson, I often write it out in outline format. Also, section times will help keep you on task, and a cover page with the lesson objective, classroom setup notes, a list of the information to be taught, and special teacher instructions will help you review at a glance.

Plan what your students will be doing while you are teaching. Will they be writing? Listening?

Post your lesson objective in the classroom every day. It will help keep your students on track, you on track, and if you should happen to be randomly observed that day, your visitors will know what you are trying to achieve, too.

If you can, try new lessons on your best classes first. If it does not work after three tries and revisions, then consider more drastic changes or scrapping it.

Do not forget to review and quiz students on past information frequently. Research shows that because the act of retrieving information from memory works like a muscle that gets stronger with use, frequent quizzes work better at moving information to long-term memory than frequent study. Also, do not be afraid to plan a review lesson for techniques you have taught after a few successive classes, particularly before a mid-term or final exam. Students need repetition and review. By helping them by understanding their limitations, they will come to understand that you truly aim to support them. Good luck!

References

Lemov, Doug (2010) *Teach Like a Champion: 49 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College (K-12)*. John Wiley & Sons.

Maruyama, Keisuke (2005). *JET shonen no tame ni nihongo no oshiekata* (Teaching Japanese for JET participants). JET Programme Japanese Language Course- Linguistics and Pedagogy Course: CLAIR.

LESSON EVALUATION

Often neglected, a joint evaluation of the lesson is an integral part of team teaching. The process is very similar to that of lesson planning, and though it does not necessarily require as much time as lesson planning does, the evaluation should be given more than a perfunctory two-minute comment while returning to the teachers' room. This is one area, however, where many teachers, both JTEs and ALTs, are confused. What exactly is being evaluated? How does one go about it?

It should be clearly understood that evaluation is not meant as an evaluation of the teachers' language ability, nor of how many mistakes were made. It is primarily intended for both teachers to evaluate the efficiency of the lesson and work towards improvements on the techniques and activities used during it. Therefore, the first topic to cover is the lesson objectives. Were they attained, and if so, to the satisfaction of both teachers? If not, why not? Were they too vague or ambiguous? Also:

- How were the students' performances? Were they able to carry out the activity satisfactorily? Did they understand most of what was said in English? Were they bored or fidgety? Was their participation active? Did it involve thinking on their part? How much of the time did they spend listening to the teachers?
- What are the roles of the teachers? Should anything be changed about the teachers' performances to improve the activity, and if so, how? Were both teachers satisfied with their roles? Did either teacher feel there were problems with the role division? How was the rapport with the students? Was the interaction between the JTE, ALT and students satisfactory? Was the activity too teacher-centred?
- What about the lesson materials? Is there any other way the activity could be improved? For example, using more visual aids, changing the way instructions are given, or delegating more responsibility to the students?

If at all possible, have regular meetings to discuss overall team teaching procedure. How did the planning go? Was enough time allowed to adequately plan the lesson? Did the lesson plan fulfill the requirements and hopes of both teachers? How was the planning done: jointly, or separately with a joint meeting held later? Was it done early enough to allow for the preparation of materials?

The quality of the actual team-work in class should be discussed, but this is a difficult area, because it is not easy to say anything negative about the other teacher. A technique to handle the situation is to discuss the activity first, indicating that there seems to have been a problem with it, and how does the other teacher think it could be solved or improved? Once a discussion begins, it may be more feasible to make suggestions on how the teachers' performance can be changed. Note the word "teachers," when emphasis is placed on making a change in the performance of both teachers, one teacher is less likely to feel threatened.

Evaluation is necessary, because it not only completes the process, but it also gives both teachers insights on how to improve their own teaching, in addition to their team teaching techniques. Constructive criticism and evaluation is necessary for improvement. Likewise, doing the evaluation together may give the JTE some good ideas on how to improve his or her own teaching procedure after the ALT has left the school. Team teaching can be a learning process for teachers as well as students if time is taken to analyse it.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

People new to teaching (and sometimes those not so new) often assume that only the content of the lesson needs to be planned for their lesson to run smoothly. While it is true that thorough lesson planning can help eliminate many potential problems, consistent success also depends on classroom management; that is, the technical as opposed to the intellectual aspects of the job. Classroom language needs to be checked or taught at the beginning. Decide which instructions will be used most frequently and what the students might need in order to ask for information or say they have not understood. Introduce this language where necessary. It is a good idea to use as many gestures and physical response activities as possible to illustrate the language. When setting up an activity, make sure the instructions are clear and concise. If there is more than one stage to the activity, give the instructions for each stage as you come to it. If given all at once they will forget what they have to do even if it is translated.

There is no perfect way to manage a classroom; however, we can commit ourselves to a positive approach to classroom management.

- Clearly define expectations. Students are often eager to please when they know what you want from them. Cultural differences may lead to misunderstandings about what you expect from your students and vice-versa. Setting clear rules and limits can help minimise these problems.
- Acknowledge positive behaviour. Praise and encourage students rather than focusing on their negative behaviours. This also promotes a positive learning environment.
- Keep a positive attitude. Students may be sensitive to your attitude towards them. If you perceive your students as eager and willing to learn, they may become as such.

Preventing Discipline Problems in the Classroom

There is a range of methods ALT and JTE can try to use in order to prevent discipline problems.

- Accept each student as a worthwhile and important person, and understand that the student's behavior is a reflection of his or her life experiences to date.
- Anticipate behaviours and intervene before disruptive behavior occurs.
- Provide materials, activities and opportunities that reflect a wide range of interests and abilities.
- Alternate between livelier and quieter lesson activities.
- Maintain an orderly flow through routines so the students are neither hurried nor required to spend much time waiting.
- Plan the lesson appropriate for the developmental stages of the students. Children need challenges, but not serious frustrations.
- Take note of the kind of activities that work well or did not work well in your various classes.
For example: this class needs a good warm-up, this class needs a cool-down.

Dealing with Disruption

In Japan it is thought that disruptive behaviours should not be allowed during study time. However you might not often encounter students being kicked out of class for disruption (refer to the following section on discipline). Here are a few tips you can use for coping with difficult students or classes:

- Ignore them: Sometimes they are deliberately trying to attract attention and will stop if there is no audience.
- Signal disapproval: A stare, a negative head movement, or a hand signal is often enough to stop unacceptable behaviour.
- Proximity: Moving towards a disruptor or standing by a talker's desk with a stern look of disapproval will often quiet him/her down.
- Stop speaking: Do not start again until everyone has realised why you stopped.
- Make the class stand up: If the class is a generally chatty one, this tactic used sparingly can serve as a shock and silence a class quickly. Only let them sit down when they are all quiet.
- Humour: Used at the right time and without ridicule or sarcasm, you can show disapproval

without hard feelings.

- Single out the student to answer a question. Pause the lesson until he or she quiets down or answers the question.
- On the long term: build relationships with your students. Learn your students' names and make time to speak with them individually whenever you can. The personal touch goes a long way when students know that you have taken a personal interest in them and taken the time to learn their names.

Be aware that there may be underlying issues at work, developmental issues, family problems, club activities, or other recent changes. Ask your coworkers about your students and any difficulties you should know about. It is also important to realise that if your only point of contact with the students is in the classroom, you may find your classroom problems lingering for quite some time. Try to interact with your students more outside of class, and your problems in the classroom may start to disappear.

Be aware that classroom situations slowly improve or deteriorate seemingly without rhyme or reason through the course of the year. Your attempts to minimise disruptions may be met with little success at the moment but over time classes may improve for no apparent reason. Remember, you are part of a team with not only your team teaching partner but also the homeroom teacher and the whole staff. Careful planning will generally make your lesson successful and enjoyable. However this is not guaranteed. It is likely that you will do things which do not conform to their expectations. Be sensitive and make allowances for differences. The main thing to remember is if things do not work well at first, do not give up. Look at what happened, see where the flaws are, adapt and try again. **Do not lose your temper, keep your sense of humour!**

POSSIBLE PROBLEM SITUATIONS

The following section covers a variety of possible problems that you might encounter in your teaching situations. Although it is neither intended to give alarm nor to be sensational, and many of you may never come across any such situations, some may find it helpful to read examples of the kind of problems experienced by others and some of the possible solutions.

A Sudden Change in the Timetable

This is something which seems to happen quite frequently. If you develop the habit of looking at the blackboard every morning and asking other teachers you should not be caught off guard.

Losing a Speech Contest

It is unfortunate that after a lot of hard work students who do not gain a place are considered to have failed outright. In this situation it can be helpful to rationalise things a little and point out the positive results: their progress, how well they did considering the competition, how pleased you are with their achievement and not least, their courage for even entering the contest. If they did not receive a certificate for entering, you could make one and present it yourself.

The Teacher Makes an Obvious Mistake

Firstly, the teacher's authority should never be brought into question in front of the students. The suggestion of a mistake from the native speaker does nothing for the self-esteem of the Japanese language teacher, and must be handled with tact. Place the emphasis on communication, rather than perfection. If someone is speaking in the foreign language, that is good, if you can understand them, great, if there are a few mistakes in the grammar, big deal. If asked, however, you have little option but to point out the mistake. Most people seem to use little white lies (if the class is listening) to maintain confidence, face and harmony. A frequently used device is to say, "In my country we say this...." or "That is a little old-fashioned

or formal." You can always lighten the atmosphere by quoting your own mistakes in Japanese. When your opinion is not asked, but you feel it should not go uncorrected, whisper the correct version or write it. Alternatively, use the correct form a few minutes later in the lesson and give the teacher the opportunity to notice the difference. The most useful piece of advice on this sensitive point is to keep it as good-humoured as possible; better that the teacher speaks, however idiosyncratically, than gives up speaking altogether.

A Student Bursts into Tears in Your Class

If at all possible, ask the JTE or another teacher to intervene and help. Look sympathetic, but it is probably not a good idea to get involved at this stage, as this could produce more tears due to the communication barrier and embarrassment.

The student could be crying because of some irrational fear of foreigners or of the foreign language itself. Do not just assume that the student is "being silly." Consider the possibility of other factors, such as family problems. Do not always rely on your colleagues to warn you of this. If it seems appropriate and if the tears were obviously due to a sense of failure in class, talk to the student later, when he or she has calmed down. Give him/her a chance to answer a very easy question to restore confidence and morale.

The Class Begins Laughing Hysterically

While you can expect a lot of high spirits initially, actual hysterical laughter is a different matter. If it is an isolated incident, try to ignore it. Avoid asking questions to those who seem to find so much to laugh about, at least until they settle down and feel more at ease in your presence. If it starts to happen regularly and disrupts the class, it might be worth having a word with the homeroom teacher or the teacher that you team-teach with in that class. Your own personality and the exact nature of the laughter will be the most important factor behind your reaction; you could use your own sense of humour to defuse things.

Student or Class is not Participating in an Activity

First check students' comprehension. Students may not feel comfortable interrupting a teacher to ask for clarification. Use slow and simple English. Do not be afraid to gesture or act out. Break directions into individual steps. At each step check for comprehension. If nothing is working, have your JTE explain it. Sometimes it takes several attempts over a few classes to work out your students' English level and what methods work best for them. When the activity starts, circulate the room addressing individual questions, or correcting any misunderstandings. Do not be afraid to ask your JTE for assistance if there is a communication breakdown. If the class is quiet in general, students may be shy or reluctant to stand out among their peers. To counteract this, create activities that allow students to work in groups or teams, do not single out students, and use prizes or incentives for answering (correct and incorrect). Incorporate warm-up activities that help get students ready to think and speak in English. Remember that enthusiasm is contagious and bring energy to your classroom.

Inappropriate Questions

One typical question is "Do you find 'X' sensei attractive?" The frequency with which this question occurs across the land reveals the extent of this as a standing joke. It should be treated as such, but with a sense of caution, since it could easily be misinterpreted. Some JET participants always say "yes" when asked, or if they are asked to specify which one they like best, they simply say the name of the one with them at the time, or simply, "It's a secret." Other escapes are to say that you like all the teachers, and leave it at that, to make a joke, or to turn the question to the student who asked, and ask for their feelings. On the other hand, some JET participants believe that discretion should be maintained on this point, no matter how innocently the question was intended. If you do not feel comfortable answering any of their questions there are a few approaches you can take.

- Feign incomprehension "*I'm sorry, I don't understand*"
- Redirect with an unrelated answer: "*I like ice cream. Do you like ice cream?*"
- Learn how to say "*That is not appropriate*" in Japanese

- Laugh and shake your head
- Agree and amplify to ridiculous levels. “- Do you have a girlfriend” “- Yes, seven. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday...”
- Reverse the question on them. “Do YOU have a boyfriend?”

If you feel that a certain question is inappropriate for your classroom you may want to discuss it with the JTE and/or the student who had asked this question. Keep in mind some questions that offend you may seem innocuous to the students. Do not show that you are upset.

Inappropriate Touching

Some students engage in comic mischief which is acceptable in Japan but would be absolutely unacceptable in your home country. For example, they may try to touch you inappropriately. This is especially true of elementary school students. This might be a difficult stumbling block for some people. Some ALTs take it in stride and consider it rough housing with the kids. If it crosses your comfort line you can also tell them to stop. Use an authoritative voice, and the appropriate Japanese. A stern face can really help drive this home. Alternatively, some ALTs make it exceedingly clear from the beginning that they will not tolerate inappropriate touching. In this case, you can make an example of a student by very loudly and sternly telling them “ No.” or “*Dame*” (this is wrong.) In many cases, it is best to set limitations before the students start pushing your boundaries.

Bullying

You may happen to see bullying taking place right under your nose during class. Maybe a student keeps making fun of another student, kicking them under their desk, or even two or three students laughing at a student who tries to answer a question in English. A student being picked on is probably having a rough time of it. There are many ways to react in situations involving bullying. The important thing is to stay calm and realise that you may not know the circumstances surrounding the situation. You may choose to deal with the situation in class or wait and discuss it with the JTE after class. If it is a recurring situation in the same class you may want to discuss it with the homeroom teacher as well.

Manga

Reading books having nothing to do with the lesson during class can be a problem in any country. It just so happens that many Japanese students like to read manga (comics). Be careful when disciplining in this area. The students reading these books may be reading them because they do not understand anything that you are saying. They may feel it is better for them to be reading than talking among their friends during class. A few JTEs may agree with this way of thinking. A few ideas may be to bring in comic books from your home country for them or ask them to try to explain the plot of the manga to you in English. Again, discuss this type of behaviour with the JTE and find out what the options are in helping to get the student involved in the lesson.

Mobile Phones

Many Japanese students own mobile phones. In some schools, students are forbidden to bring their phones to school, in others students are allowed to bring them. However, being allowed to carry a mobile phone to school does not mean that the students are allowed to use them in the classroom during lesson time. Some students send e-mail and text messages from their phones, or play games on them during class. In extreme situations, you may have students actually speaking on the phone in class. This can be both distracting and annoying for not only the teachers, but also for the other students. Taking the phone away from the student may not be the solution - after all, it is the property of the student, and taking it away from them may cause resentment. Once again, discuss how to handle this situation with the JTE and try to come up with a solution to the problem together.

DISCIPLINE IN THE CLASSROOM

Customs in Japan

The image many people have of Japanese students is of diligent, passive hard-workers who are highly disciplined. When you arrive in a Japanese school, however, you will probably soon find that this is not always the case. Japan has its fair share of rebellious youth, and especially if you are in a so-called “low-level” school you may find that there are some disruptive students in your classes. The way JTEs handle discipline problems probably differ from the ways your teachers at school handled problems in your home country. You should take time to familiarise yourself with the way JTEs react to problem situations and leave behind some of your preconceptions about classroom management.

In your home country, teachers probably gave lines or detentions, or sent students out of the classroom or to the principal if they were disrupting the class. In more serious cases students were probably suspended or even expelled from school. In Japan, one important principle is that all students have the right to take classes, and consequently a Japanese educator would find it totally unacceptable to send a student out of the classroom, no matter how disruptive their behaviour. Detentions do exist, but parents are often not informed and so it is not regarded as such a big deal. There are also different ideas about the roles of parents and teachers, and parents often expect the schools to take more responsibility for their children’s wrongdoing, while they themselves tend to be more permissive with their children. This means that reporting bad behaviour to parents may not be as effective a deterrent as it is in other countries.

In Japan when a student has been disruptive in class, the emphasis is not so much on punishment as it is on making him or her feel remorse or feel ashamed about his or her actions. A student who has been caught smoking may be required to write a letter expressing regret at having had a cigarette. The teachers have other methods of discipline which you may not be aware of, as the teacher may not be confronting the students in front of you or in the way you expect. Do not jump to the conclusion that nothing is being done or nothing effective is being done as the Japanese teacher probably has a better idea than you of what are appropriate and effective disciplinary measures in a Japanese school.

Corporal Punishment

The law in Japan is absolutely unequivocal on this issue - corporal punishment (the striking of students) is forbidden in schools. The teachers you work with and indeed the whole school staff are all aware of this. Neither of these make corporal punishment in schools alright - under no circumstances should it take place because it is illegal.

Having said that, it does take place sometimes and if you are unfortunate enough to witness such an episode, you may want to know what you can do. There is a mechanism in place for further steps to be taken by the head of the school reporting the incident to the local board of education. It is the job of the principal to do this. Remember that you are a very junior member of staff and while your judgment might be useful as you come from a place where things are done a little differently, the best solution is for the principal and staff members to use their judgment and knowledge of the situation to assess how to proceed. The following are some ideas of things you yourself might want to do.

- If the incident occurs in a classroom where you are team teaching, you should take the time after the lesson to discuss your views on corporal punishment with the JTE concerned. You are one half of a team whilst team teaching and so you can request that it does not take place in your classroom. As with anything else, you should be prepared to present your own views and listen to those of your colleagues. You are much more likely to be listened to if you present your case in a calm and diplomatic way than if you get emotional.

- If you witness an incident outside your classroom and you think it should be taken further, talk to your supervisor about it. The matter can be dealt with best by the school itself. Measures to be taken have been determined by the education authorities, and the staff in

your school know about them. The school authorities may decide to proceed in a way that you find ineffective and are not satisfied with. This is their decision and whilst you can talk to your supervisor, other staff members and even the principal about your opinions and make sure that everyone knows what you witnessed, they are the ones who make the ultimate decision about what to do. Ultimately, you are a junior and temporary member of staff and you may have to accept that other peoples' judgment takes precedence over yours.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AS VIEWED BY AN ALT

Peter Martin (Yamanashi Prefecture, 2003-06)

Many ALTs find classroom management in Japan to be very different from the system we know in our home countries. When I was placed in a small Japanese town as an ALT, I expected to see well-behaved students in class. At first, I was upset because students were "getting away" with behaviours that I never would have allowed at home. I was not sure whether I should confront the students or not, but being a new ALT, I decided I needed to take a step back and watch what was really going on before jumping to conclusions.

To outside eyes, the approach taken to discipline by Japanese teachers may seem random, or practically non-existent at first glance. But just because the JTEs you work with seem to turn blind eyes to the girls typing away on their cellphone, the kids talking out and throwing paper-airplanes, or the boy in the front row blatantly reading manga during English class, does not mean they do not care what is going on in their classroom. Each school does have its own system in place, and teachers spend an exhaustive amount of time discussing and dealing with disciplinary problems, or rather, student problems. In fact, I realise now that the burden on Japanese teachers for disciplining students is far greater than it was for me teaching in my home country.

The role of teachers in Japan and their exceptionally close interaction with students and their families accounts for the sharp contrast between the classrooms I was used to and Japanese classrooms. I was at school during a faculty meeting one time, and a frantic mother called to interrupt the meeting: her son had just been in a minor traffic accident and needed to go to the hospital. The first place she called was not the police, not emergency services, not a doctor. The first place she called was the school. Immediately, the meeting was cancelled, as four teachers left to go take care of the student, and his family. They ended up driving him to the hospital. This kind of unmatched (in my home country, at least) intimacy creates a unique situation for disciplining students.

When I studied to become a teacher, I learned how to control a classroom for one hour at a time. In Japan, teachers have to work hard outside of the classroom, not only so that problems in the classroom can be dealt with effectively, but also because they carry responsibility for every aspect of their students' behaviour. My fellow teachers set up booths at local festivals which act as juvenile law enforcement stations, from which teachers check to see which students are present, whom they are with, whether they are safe, and whether they are "up to no good". If students are seen at festivals with students from other schools, this is reported at the next day's morning meeting. More so than parents even, Japanese teachers need to be aware of their students' entire social lives: what they have been doing, whom they have been seeing, and how their families are doing. If one of the "bad boys" starts dating one of the "good girls," you can bet that your co-workers know, and are concerned about it.

Because they know their students so well, Japanese teachers discipline each student based on what is "normal" behaviour for that student. Disciplining undesired behaviours based on mutually agreed-upon and understood classroom rules with prescribed consequences seems too cold and dispassionate in the terms of their relationship to the students. Instead, discipline is administered according to what is "normal" and what is "deviant" behaviour for the infracting student, given the particular set of circumstances surrounding the event. Essentially, minor infractions are often permitted for some students who are naturally more inclined to act

out, but frowned upon by students who are normally well-behaved. My JTE allows behaviours which I would not have tolerated in my classroom, but for him it is not entirely about how they are acting during English class. He has a much longer view of the development of the students than just the next 50 minute class. Thus, he manages his class in this manner because he knows all the ins-and-outs of his students' lives, and specifically chooses which circumstances require which actions based on the large amount of information he has at his disposal. If you are not satisfied with the state of the classroom, by all means let that be known. But before taking the role of disciplining the class into your own hands, it is important to talk to your co-workers, especially your JTEs. Remember that discipline is the responsibility of your Japanese counterpart, and unless your JTE is willing to back up your efforts to manage student behaviour, you are bound to become frustrated. Students may not respond to your unfamiliar disciplinary techniques, and your attempts will be undercut immediately if your JTE contradicts you. Although your teaching style and attitude undoubtedly has an impact on classroom management, it is important to keep in mind as well that by attempting to seize control of classroom management, you might be disrespecting your TT partner and putting a strain on that relationship.

In the end, the most effective thing you can do as an ALT to improve student behaviour is to make your lessons as interesting and stimulating as possible. If you find that disruptions in the classroom are inhibiting your ability to be an effective educator, you should make the time to discuss the matter with your JTE. Ask your JTE in advance if he or she can schedule some time for a meeting so you can talk this over, and you may have to be accommodating if the only time you can meet is after your normal working hours. Together, you can strategise and possibly rethink your roles in the classroom.

STUDENT MOTIVATION

Making your lessons as interesting and stimulating as possible may not only improve students' behaviour, it will also ideally enhance their motivation to study a foreign language. Motivation is the most important factor in any form of study or education. Motivation is either intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation comes from within the individual (generally because the thing that they are learning is interesting to them). Different people are intrinsically motivated to do different things.

Extrinsic motivation is brought about by influence from outside the individual. In schools it can take the form of examinations, tests and completion of the *chosasho*, a report written by teachers on each pupil recommending them to attend a particular high school. In the business world it takes the form of promises of promotion. If there is neither intrinsic motivation nor extrinsic motivation to learn then learning does not take place.

The amount of independent study a student does correlates directly to their intrinsic or extrinsic motivation.

If the motivation to learn is not present in a student it is our job as teachers to provide the missing motivation. For this reason when you plan a lesson you must consider the motivation level of your students. Do your students love learning foreign languages in any form? More realistically, does the high school or university entrance examination provide the extrinsic motivation needed to make your students study? Your creativity is needed to incorporate the interests of your students into your lessons. You have to imagine that you are the student to help you decide if your lesson is motivating or not.

In order to help students develop their communicative abilities, ALTs should use as much of their native language as possible when communicating with them. The instructions and feedback given by teachers are examples of English used in a real way; one that is meaningful to the students. If you use English for these things you will be helping students to build up their confidence and listening abilities, and encourage Japanese teachers to do likewise.

Successful communication in a foreign language may be the greatest motivation of any motivational technique in language study. Have you ever asked a perfectly legitimate question in Japanese only to receive a look of confusion from the person to whom you

addressed the question? How did that make you feel? The importance of trying to speak deserves extra concentration from the person listening. The students are incredibly happy and content when they realise that you understood what they said to you in a foreign language.

Of course there are other motivational techniques.

Rewards - this technique tends to work well with the younger grades, although if used efficiently and creatively it may also help in the older grades. Do not put yourself out of a lot of money when using this technique. However, receiving anything free is great. Print clubs (sticker pictures taken in small machines located on almost any corner - really popular among not only Japanese teenagers but also among other JET participants) of you and your foreign friends are treasures to some kids. Used more frequently are stamps, stickers, home country's small coins, etc. Please keep in mind that these are not lasting presents therefore the motivation that accompanies them may not last either.

Letters and Clubs - keeping in touch with your students can motivate them. Writing letters of encouragement or just simple letters for fun can make each student feel very special. Also, joining the students in their after school clubs can create a bond with certain students and cause them to try to learn the language that you want them to learn. Most people like it when someone is interested in something that they enjoy.

Study Japanese - when the students see you trying to learn their language then maybe they will try to learn yours. This can be a lasting motivation for them even in the future, so start studying! *Ganbatta!*

Simple Questions - Ask simple questions, even ones that you may think are too easy to ask. Chances are it will be an encouragement and a motivator if the student is able to answer the question. It shows that communication is possible. Pitch your language so that it can be understood and do not use unnecessary words.

ALT WITH A TEACHING BACKGROUND

The number of trained teachers participating on the JET Programme is increasing. For many, the chance to live and work abroad offers a great professional opportunity to experience firsthand another country's educational system and, in turn, to develop as a teacher. Here in Japan, the school system and teaching methodology may well be different from that which you have previously encountered. As a result, ALTs who are trained teachers are likely to face a number of unique and interesting challenges.

From the outset, the position of the experienced teacher is somewhat different from that of other ALTs. There are a number of reasons for this. To begin with, feeling nervous about standing in front of a class of students may not be an issue, the trained teacher having already developed his or her classroom "persona." Secondly, the trained teacher is likely to have a sense of methodology; how to plan and deliver lessons based upon specific aims and objectives, and how to evaluate the needs which are changed according to the realities of team teaching in Japan. Knowledge and experience of teaching methodology is a useful tool for any ALT. Furthermore, trained teachers are likely to be aware of many of the non-teaching duties that affect school life such as extracurricular activities, student guidance, discipline and school administration. This may be an advantage in the process of familiarising yourself with your new work surroundings. And finally, as a trained teaching professional you will have something in common with all your new Japanese colleagues.

Perhaps the biggest difference between your past teaching experience and your classroom role in Japan is that, from now, you will be "team-teaching." In team teaching, the relationship between the ALT and the JTE is essential if lessons are to be delivered effectively, yet sometimes for JET participants with a teaching background, team teaching can lead to frustrations. Most obviously, there is the question of space in the classroom. As a solo teacher you are used to being the central authority figure in the class and to a certain extent

it is up to you to decide how and what you will teach according to curricular guidelines. As an ALT, however, it is your role to assist the JTE in the classroom. Exactly how you assist often depends on who you are teaching with.

Sometimes, in what appears to be a rather junior role, ALTs may feel that the skills they gained from past experience and in teacher training are not being fully utilised. Bear in mind that even though you are a trained teacher in your home country, you are not certified in Japan. Your qualifications, therefore, may not necessarily be fully acknowledged in your new teaching job. However this need not be the case. Knowing that you are qualified to teach in your home country, JTEs are likely to show you greater respect, and you will not necessarily have to abandon your own methodologies. On the contrary, you will probably find that many of the JTEs you work with will be curious and interested to learn about new ways of doing things. The point is that you have to try to create an environment where ideas can be shared. Effective team teaching relies on a relationship of mutual respect between the ALT and the JTE. Get to know your team teaching partners and show them that you are prepared to listen. By doing this you will be able to build relationships and form the basis for successful team teaching partnerships. Accordingly, you will be able to create a team teaching environment where methodologies are exchanged, lesson planning is shared and your teaching skills are utilised.

On the other hand, as a trained teacher, you may find yourself in the situation where everything is left to you. After all, you are both certified to teach and a native speaker of the target language. In this situation, you may find yourself doing all the lesson planning and practically all the teaching too. Initially, this can be rewarding like solo teaching, but there are some drawbacks. First of all, unless you speak good Japanese or you teach very advanced learners, it is actually quite difficult to explain the procedure of your language activities to the students unless you choose to do very simple things. Furthermore, it is the JTE who spends the rest of the week with the class, and it is he or she who knows the pitch of the students and the section of the language textbook that they are currently studying. Moreover, knowing the students' pitch and their progress using the language textbooks is important information for you to know. In addition to this, even though you are a trained teacher in your home country, you may not teach languages and, in fact, may feel uncertain in yourself about teaching a class of Japanese students virtually alone. The solution to these kinds of problems is to talk with your JTE and to try and form a working relationship. It is more than likely that the reason he or she is leaving everything to you is due to a level of uncertainty on their part. Many JTEs feel embarrassed about their speaking ability in the very languages that they teach. Many had little chance, if any, to speak with an ALT while they were students. Be cooperative, flexible, patient and understanding, and try to involve them. Set aside a time often where you can plan lessons together. When you have an idea, ask them for their advice about it and try to use activities in the classroom that need both of you. Reassure them in a tactful way that their foreign language ability is really okay and that the best lessons are team-taught lessons.

On the whole, as a trained teacher on the JET Programme, you are more likely to detect areas where improvements could be made in the team teaching class. Yet, as much as the Japanese teachers you work with may welcome your comments and suggestions aimed at improving team teaching, it is important to remember that, in Japan, change occurs slowly. More than this, since the majority of JET participants arrive in Japan with little or no Japanese language ability and perhaps, more importantly, little experience of the way that things work in Japan, adjustments to classes that seem like a good idea and easy to accomplish as far as you are concerned, may appear quite the opposite to your Japanese colleagues. With this in mind, it is important to be patient about making moves to improve classes as this may be taken as criticism. Voice suggestions carefully and sensitively. Again, should problems arise, the best strategy is to develop personal relationships with your teachers. As you establish these, you make it easier to explain what you want to do and why.

As a JET participant who is a trained teacher, there are some important things to bear in mind. Remember that many of the teachers you will be working with have had very little or no chance to observe or learn about teaching methodologies other than the didactic lecture

style that they were taught. Furthermore, remember that up to now the Japanese system of education has, for the most part, served Japan well, even if its aims and purpose may be quite different from that of the education system in your own country. Be respectful. What may appear logical, obvious and practical to the teachers you work with may have you baffled and confused and may even run counter to your training and vice versa in relation to what appears logical and obvious to you. This can be frustrating. Nevertheless, avoid judging Japanese education negatively on the basis of comparisons with your own country and, instead, try to observe and understand what is going on around you. What you experience here will probably be more enlightening than any course in comparative education. Make the most of it.

Finally, remember why you are here. The JET Programme itself is recognition by the Japanese government that the development of an internationally aware education is essential for the future. Maintain your professionalism and keep your goals as a teacher well in sight. Contribute, be a self starter and get involved as much as you can. As a trained teacher, you probably have more ideas that are specifically related to teaching compared to other ALTs. Try to use them, but be aware that school life in Japan has its own characteristics and that, as a teacher, you will need to adjust. If you are flexible and make an effort to develop relationships with your team teaching colleagues, you should be able to make satisfactory use of your past experience and qualifications.

USING SYNERGY IN THE TEAM-TAUGHT CLASSROOM

Dr Robin Sakamoto, Kyorin University

Team teaching has the potential to provide students with an atmosphere where immense learning occurs. Unfortunately, many teachers find themselves in classroom situations where team-teaching does take place but without any foreseeable gain for the students. It is the goal of this article to introduce four major classifications of team-taught classrooms and to illustrate the advantages and disadvantages found in each of these environments.

The opinions expressed in this chapter come from my own team teaching experience over five consecutive years in the Japanese junior and senior high school English classroom, in addition to over seven years of teaching at the university level. The Japanese students I instruct will become the English teachers of tomorrow. Therefore, this chapter is written having a unique depth of knowledge from this bi-focal perspective. Although this article mainly uses examples based on team teaching situations in elementary school, the theory used can be applied to any school level.

To give a general context for team-teaching English in the elementary school classroom in Japan, I would like to provide the Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) with a metaphor to aid in understanding the situation from a Japanese teacher's perspective. Imagine that you are in your native country working for a major company. Your supervisors decide that to boost company morale and to foster growth in individual employees, a company orchestra will be formed. While specifics, such as what kind of music will be played, or how the instruments will be purchased, have not yet been determined, the orchestra is to begin rehearsal the following year with all but first and second year employees participating.

One day, you are called into your supervisor's office and told that based on your experience as a violinist in your high school and university orchestra, you have been given the honour of conducting the new orchestra. Naturally you refuse saying that you have never conducted an orchestra before. But, you are reassured that it is just to have fun and that you do not need to give any major performances. The aim is to just enjoy making music together. Furthermore, to help you out from time to time, a professional soloist living in the neighborhood will attend rehearsals. During that time you can adapt the rehearsals so that

you and the soloist can work together as a team. You leave your supervisor's office wondering how you will find the time to learn all the techniques necessary to conduct an orchestra while working full time at your job. Furthermore, you are keenly aware that for some employees who have never been exposed to an orchestra before, you will play a key role in determining their future enjoyment of or even disenchantment with classical music.

This is the situation many elementary school teachers now face in Japan. Many of them are being asked to conduct classes in English although they have no knowledge of second language acquisition methodology. The philosophy stated in MEXT's *New Course of Study for Foreign Language Activities in Elementary Schools* is that instruction aims at fostering a positive attitude toward communication, and centers on listening and speaking. However, second language acquisition research has shown that, "most anxiety is associated with speaking the language. In fact, speaking publicly in the target language has been found to be extremely anxiety-provoking for many students, even those who feel no stress in all other aspects of language learning (Horwitz et al. 1986)". If speaking in a second language is so stressful for students, elementary school teachers in Japan seem faced with a difficult task. They are being required to be communicative in a language most of them have only experienced as a student in a grammar-translation centred classroom. It is like our fictitious employee being asked to conduct an orchestra based solely on prior participation in the activity.

How can teachers overcome these obstacles? The authors of this handbook hope that some of the answers may be found here. However, a large responsibility for the success of teaching English in the classroom will also fall on native speakers of English who participate in team teaching. The remainder of this chapter will examine specific ways in which the ALT can enhance team teaching and provide students with a productive and enjoyable learning experience.

The Four Team Teaching Environments

The team teaching environment develops from the interaction between the Japanese teacher of English (JTE) with the assistant language teacher (ALT). Figure 1 illustrates four possible classroom environments that develop from this interaction. Each axis shows the involvement of the teacher in the classroom from least to most effective. In the case of the ALT the axis reads horizontally from left to right with least effective being on the far left and most effective on the far right. For the JTE, the axis reads vertically, with least effective being at the bottom and most effective being at the top.

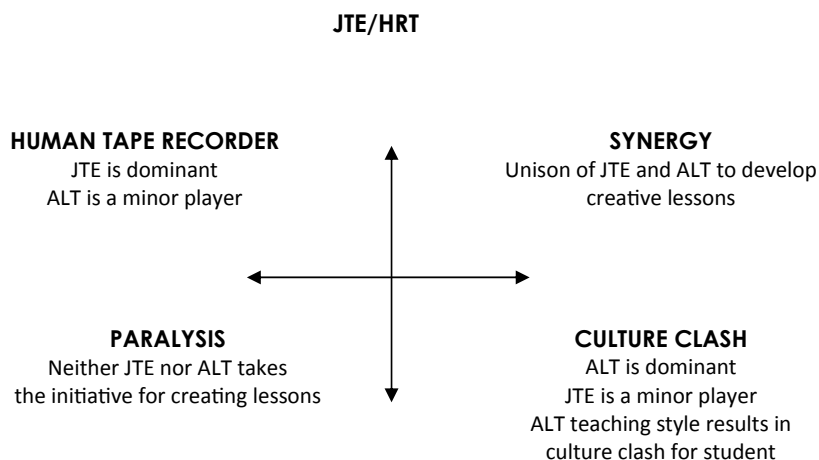


Figure 1. The four team teaching environments

The following discussion will identify characteristics present in each of these four quadrants and suggest possible ways for the ALT in any one of the situations to create a better learning environment. The benefits of synergy and specific examples in how to use synergy in the team-taught classroom will also be discussed.

Paralysis

Paralysis defines the team-taught environment characterised by a lack of initiative. Neither the JTE nor the ALT instigates effective lesson planning. While there are many reasons for paralysis, the following email from a former student of mine, gives a most adequate definition.

Hello. How are you? I would like to tell you about my good experience with our ALT. If you have an opportunity, please tell your students.

When I went to the school for the first time, the other English teachers said to me, "the ALT who comes to this school is not positive like usual Americans. She can do nothing if we ask. So, we used her like a tape recorder. She just read the English textbook in the classroom." However, it was not true. When I met her for the first time, I tried to speak to her in English though I was a little afraid of her. Then, surprisingly, I found she was not negative. We talked a lot of things. And she invited me to discuss the lesson plan. At that time, I understood her. She said to me, "I worry that I am disturbing their work. English teachers at school want to make progress with their textbook at their own pace. Besides, I do not have teacher's license. I can just speak English. Therefore, I cannot advice positively." When I heard this, I was very shocked. The English teachers and the ALT have worked together for two years. But they cannot communicate with each other. Actually, I cannot blame the English teachers. They just do not know how to use ALT (personal communication, April 18, 2001).

In paralysis, the main characteristic is simply that no one is to blame. Neither the ALT nor the JTE for whatever reasons, feels comfortable in instigating lesson planning. The end result however, is that students do not benefit from such a team-taught experience.

Effective communication is the key

How can paralysis be overcome? As the JTE in the above letter states, communication is the key. It was only after establishing a rapport with the ALT that discussion about lesson planning began. As the ALT did not fit the stereotype of a typical American for the other JTEs, it was difficult for them to establish a relationship, as they had no idea how to communicate effectively. The ALT felt inadequately prepared as a teacher and thus did not know how to communicate effectively with the JTEs either. This situation continued unsolved for two years.

I remember a similar experience during my first year teaching in Japan. I did not know the Japanese custom of eating lunch in the classroom. Thus, when all the homeroom teachers left the teacher's room during lunchtime, I wrongly assumed that they were going into town to have lunch together. As I ate my lunch alone in the teacher's room, I continually felt resentful that I was never asked to join the other teachers for lunch.

Again this is a situation where there is no one to blame. I had made an assumption based on my own stereotype of eating lunch at school, which was completely foreign to my JTEs. The result was that because of this miscommunication, we were not building an effective relationship. The situation would have continued indefinitely had it not been for my being late one day and walking through the hallways during lunchtime. Once I saw the teachers eating lunch with the students, I was overjoyed that they might indeed like me after all. I immediately asked the Principal if I could eat with the students on a regular basis. This simple act resulted in a complete change of atmosphere at the school. The JTEs appreciated my willingness to help out and used their extra free time during lunch to catch up on their work. The time spent alone in the classroom with students in a non-academic setting was a wonderful opportunity for me. We taught each other songs, card games, and we too worked on building effective relationships through deeper communication.

Let us return for a moment to our company orchestra metaphor. You as the inexperienced conductor are awaiting the arrival of the guest soloist. Imagine how nervous you must be! Can you feel the discomfort as everyone in the orchestra looks up to you for leadership? What can you do to ensure an excellent rehearsal? How will you establish a rapport with the soloist so that you can work together as a team? Obviously, it will have to be through effective communication.

One of the best tools available in developing more effective communication with someone from a different culture is empathy. In both the above examples, it was through mutual understanding that stereotypes were broken down and real communication began. How can these goals be accomplished in the team-taught elementary school classroom? First, the ALT needs to be aware of the actual situation facing the JTE. Unbiased awareness is the first step to developing empathy. Then imagine yourself in a similar position as the JTE. Would you be comfortable in front of over thirty students teaching a subject that you had only experienced as a student? Once we can honestly see the situation from another point of view, we can begin to use the skill of empathy.

Steps to establish effective communication

What can you as the ALT do to help instigate effective lesson planning? Even before arriving at the school, initial contact instigated by the ALT is necessary. A simple phone call or a short note introducing yourself and expressing your pleasure at being able to have this opportunity will begin the process of establishing rapport with your JTE. In the case of a returning visit, you can remind the JTE of what a positive experience you had last time and how you are looking forward to seeing the students again.

If possible, this is also a good time to find out what is expected of you for the upcoming lesson. Has a topic been decided? Is there anything you can bring along to help the lesson (i.e. postcards of your hometown, pictures of your family, etc.)? Is there a list of the students' names in *romaji* for you so you can write nametags? Think of ways in which you can show your interest in making this the best possible experience for the students.

Once at the school, take a few minutes just to get to know your JTE. While Japanese are notorious for not having pictures of their family in their wallets, everyone has a hometown that they can tell you about or show you on a map. Perhaps you have even been there or it may be similar to your own hometown. These few minutes spent getting to know one another at the onset will provide a foundation from which to build a professional relationship.

When it comes time to discuss the lesson plan, be sure to listen first to what the JTE has prepared. Even if they start by asking for your ideas, wait before making any specific suggestions. Ask about the class, what the students' interests are, what they have been studying recently, and so on. Many Japanese textbooks have translations of children's books from other countries. Perhaps you could build on what they already know by transferring that information into English.

For example, one-second year Japanese language textbook includes a chapter entitled "The Letter" which is an excerpt from Frog and Toad are Friends (Lobel, 1970). While studying this lesson, students practise writing each other letters, as the main characters do in the short story. An ALT could build upon this lesson by showing students actual letters he or she has received in Japan. How are the addresses written differently? How are the stamps different? Going even further, students could be shown how their school name and address would look in English. By building upon the students' current knowledge base, the ALT and JTE can develop lesson plans that truly enhance the learning experience for the students.

Paralysis is a very uncomfortable situation for everyone. It can be remedied by striving for more effective communication. Even in a teaching environment where paralysis has been present for some time, by stepping back and trying to reestablish effective communication, paralysis can be overcome. One specific way of doing this would be through the Japanese custom of *omiyage*.

Any ALT will be aware of the boxes of cookies and souvenirs at major department stores and train stations. If you are at the same school often and feel that you are in a paralysis state of team-teaching, why not bring a small souvenir to the school from somewhere you have recently visited? As the box of goodies is shared among the JTEs in your school, you can discuss your trip, ask if anyone else has been there and essentially you will reopen the doors to effective communication. This small expenditure will show that you desire to establish a rapport with your teachers and they will feel more comfortable in sharing their ideas with you. This will gradually lead to more effective lesson planning and a better learning environment for all.

To review, paralysis was defined as a team-taught environment lacking in initiative. This situation is one in which no one is to blame. Rather, stereotypes or invalid cultural assumptions have resulted in ineffective communication between the JTE and the ALT. The best remedy for this situation is to reestablish effective communication through empathy. Furthermore, if the ALT does not feel as the JTE is making an effort to instigate effective communication, the ALT should try to establish a rapport with the JTE. Once effective communication has begun, creative lesson planning will soon follow and everyone will benefit from the new environment.

If paralysis remains in an unresolved state, it can lead to either the ALT or the JTE taking an overly dominant role in the team teaching environment. These two situations will now be addressed and their major characteristics illustrated.

Human Tape Recorder

As stated in the email above, one of the most common results of paralysis is that the JTE decides to use the ALT as a human tape recorder. In this situation, the JTE is dominant and the ALT plays only a minor role in the team-taught classroom. The JTE will lead the class and ask the ALT simply to read aloud or pronounce words written on the board to which the students respond in unison. The overall characteristic of this team teaching approach is stress. The JTE is experiencing stress in trying to work with the ALT and overcompensates by becoming totally dominant in the classroom. The ALT also experiences stress at performing such a minor role, that classroom time begins to feel as if it is only “a waste of time.” Once again, it is the students who suffer the most from such an approach to team teaching.

Empathy is the key

As with paralysis, I believe the first step to resolution of the human tape recorder syndrome is to practise empathy. Perhaps this is easier for me, as I received my provisional teaching certificate with a minor in German for grades 7-12. I can easily imagine how intimidated I would feel, if a native German speaker would appear in my classroom. Although I have been to Germany, I most certainly do not possess native speaker proficiency. I would hope that I would relish the opportunity to have my students work with a native speaker of the target or classroom language, but I also realise that I would feel very uncomfortable teaching in such an environment.

However, it is simply beyond my imagination as to what it would feel like to teach a subject that I had only experienced as a student and which I was not certified to teach. I remember all too well having to substitute teach a math class for a sick colleague. My approach to teaching the class was simply to hand out a prepared print and hope nobody asked any questions! Therefore, I can only begin to empathise with many of the elementary school teachers.

One of my first team teaching experiences was as a human tape recorder. I even brought a stopwatch into class with me to time how often I spoke aloud in class. For one 50 min-class my average “teaching” time was eight minutes. Moreover, the JTE would write grammatically incorrect statements on the board and ask me to read them aloud for the students to repeat in unison. Needless to say, I felt extremely frustrated in this environment.

Ironically enough, it was with this same teacher that I grew the most as a teacher of English. Furthermore, of the students we team-taught, I know of two who went to live and work in

the United States and another who became a junior high school English teacher. In fact, that student graduated from the university where I teach. When I asked what had inspired the decision to become an English teacher, my former student replied that it had been the atmosphere experienced in the junior high school classroom.

Steps to developing empathy

How could such an environment develop? I sincerely believe it was because both the JTE and I had the students' best interest at heart. I respected the JTE as a teacher and never caused the JTE to lose face in front of the students. I would wait until after class to suggest a better example for teaching the desired grammar point. I also made a point of offering to help this JTE with mundane tasks such as correcting papers or making copies, so that we would have more time available for lesson planning. As we built up a relationship as not only colleagues but also as friends, our team teaching improved as well as the overall classroom atmosphere. We truly enjoyed team-teaching and our students responded.

Recent research has examined the criteria for inclusion or membership among Japanese teachers (Komisarof, 2001). In order to gain and maintain in-group membership, Japanese teachers are expected:

To work far longer than the minimum, contracted forty-hour workweek.

To work far longer than the minimum, contracted 240 school days per year.

To be on time for work every day.

To attend social events after work hours and on weekends, including sharing drinks, attending group trips, and attending professional enrichment activities.

To attend work every day, avoiding protracted vacations.

To attend nonacademic events, such as ceremonies or other special occasions.

These membership criteria may not be the same in the native culture of the ALT. Therefore, it becomes difficult for an ALT to gain and maintain membership within a Japanese teaching community. The ALT is like a guest visiting the school from time to time and not an active member of the faculty. It is no wonder then, that the human tape recorder syndrome is one of the most prevalent in the team-taught classroom. It is far easier for the JTE to maintain a dominant role in the classroom and regulate the guest to specific duties, such as reading aloud, than to invest the time and energy needed to develop and maintain a relationship with the ALT.

One of the best ways to become more active in the team teaching experience is for the ALT to develop an increased awareness of the classroom environment. This can be done through conducting non-participant observation. While serving in the role of human tape recorder, carefully observe what is happening in the classroom. Chances are, you did not attend a Japanese elementary school and so many things will be new and different to you. Once you acquire a base knowledge of the classroom environment as well as the role of the teacher, you will be better equipped to suggest ways in which you can constructively help the JTE.

Even if you are not in the same school every day, your observations will be a stepping-stone in discussing lesson plans with each future teacher. After hearing the proposed lesson plan from the JTE, the ALT could suggest ideas that worked well at another school and which might also be incorporated into the day's lesson plan. Or the ALT could simply ask the JTE for clarification on an observation. This will show your honest interest in the classroom environment and also provide the JTE with an opportunity to develop your professional relationship.

I remember being very surprised at the amount of "group sharing" during class. Students would copy each other's notes, borrow pencils or coloured pens, ask for clarification of what the teacher had said, etc. which resulted in a level of noise in the classroom which I had never experienced before. Once my JTE explained that the students were not being disrespectful, I felt more comfortable going up to a group or an individual student to help out while the JTE was in the dominant teaching role. This made me feel as if I had a more active role in the class and the JTE realised that I had a keen desire to help the students learn.

To review, the human tape recorder syndrome is characterised by stress. The JTE is uncomfortable in the role of team teaching and therefore, treats the ALT as a guest capable of only limited duties. This results in stress for the ALT who would like to be treated as a member of the teaching faculty and an active participant in the team-taught classroom. Through empathy and non-participant observation, the ALT can develop a knowledge base from which to ask the JTE for clarification. The ALT can also make suggestions for lesson plan development based on these observations. By showing respect for the JTE as a professional in their field, the ALT will gradually gain a more important role in the team-taught classroom.

If the JTE is the dominant player in the team-taught classroom the result may be that the ALT becomes only a human tape recorder with little benefit for the students. However, in some team-taught classrooms the roles are reversed and the ALT becomes the dominant player. When this happens, a situation which I have termed “culture clash” develops. The characteristics of culture clash and suggestions for its resolution are discussed in the following section.

Culture Clash

Culture clash is derived from the term culture shock and refers to the situation where normal functioning is limited due to an adverse reaction to the new or different culture. This is largely an unconscious reaction but can result in stress and physical discomfort. It can be found in the English as a second language classroom, when language learning is restricted due to a clash between the students’ innate learning style with the mode of teaching demonstrated by the ALT.

Although current research has been unable to determine a major learning style preference for the Japanese learner (Call, 1995; Hyland, 1994; Reid, 1987; Stebbins, 1995), an observant ALT will notice specific characteristics present in the classroom environment. Classes are largely teacher-oriented with students in a reflective observer role. The majority of learning occurs as students write copious notes while listening to the teacher. The teacher will give students a model, which they are to imitate and correctly reproduce. This style of learning can especially be seen in the Japanese language classes but it is present in all other classes as well.

Students are rarely asked for an individual opinion. Instead, they are asked to respond orally to questions posed by the teacher. The answers are clearly stated in their textbooks and can easily be found by leafing through the pages of the text. Once a student states an answer, the remaining students are asked to either agree or disagree with the stated answer. Thus, a student rarely poses a question of her or his own imagination.

Cross-cultural understanding is the key

In an attempt to learn Japanese, I attended elementary school Japanese classes on a regular basis. I remember one class in particular where I experienced culture clash. The teacher had assigned the students homework that I had also completed. We were to have read a short story and then to write a question concerning the text. As student after student read their questions, I began to feel uncomfortable. Each student had merely transposed a line in the text in order to form a question. Not a single student asked a question about the text that could not be answered simply by referring to the textbook. As an American, I often asked “why” questions of both my parents and teachers. Thus, my homework question that I had prepared was not answerable by looking at the text. I can still feel the embarrassment and hear the ruffling of pages in the dead silence after I asked my simple “why” question and nobody could find the answer in their textbooks.

This does not mean that there is one correct approach to learning. What it does illustrate is that as an ALT, one may have been exposed to learning in a different venue than the students you will be asked to teach. While the ALT may be very comfortable in asking students for a personal opinion, the students may be unable to answer. This is not because they do not have an opinion but rather because the answer is not stated in the text before them. The students are feeling a culture clash between their learning style and the mode of teaching by

the ALT.

For some JTEs it is tempting to ask the ALT to run the class. The ALT is a native speaker of the language and thus may appear to be more in control of the teaching subject. However, merely speaking a language does not make one a teacher of that language. To return to the orchestra metaphor, just having the experience of playing an instrument does not make one a conductor. While students may seem enthusiastic at first, without proper understanding of the students' learning style, the ALT may soon find difficulties. At this point, the observant JTE could step in and help out, but often this does not happen. The result is that once again, students do not receive the best learning opportunity.

Steps to cross-cultural understanding

To give a specific example, I would like to refer to the teaching of the ABC song. This is a melody that Japanese students know well and many teachers enthusiastically teach students to sing the ABCs. They become very pleased when the students can sing along and feel as if the students are learning English. But in actuality, what have the students really learned? They have learned to sing a song in English and the order in which the English alphabet occurs. This latter piece of knowledge will only be used once they attempt to use an English dictionary, which will be many years down the road. Moreover, in learning the ABC song, students actually experience culture clash.

The Japanese language consists of three scripts, two of which, *hiragana* and *katakana* resemble the English alphabet. Students learn both *hiragana* and *katakana* in their first year of schooling and it is through using these characters that all future learning occurs. In this way, *hiragana* and *katakana* resemble an English alphabet. However, there is a fundamental difference that cannot be ignored. *Hiragana* and *katakana* are phonetic and once students learn the sounds associated with the symbols they become literate to anything written in those scripts. This is vastly different from the English alphabet. Although a student may recognise and be able to name the letters of the English alphabet, they are a far cry from being literate in English.

For a Japanese student who has already learned *hiragana* and *katakana* as stepping-stones to all future learning, the ABC song presents difficulties. While it can be learned quickly, it is not phonetic and so does not help in future learning. Why does b-a-t become bat? Students are excited at learning English and confident of their ability to recognise the letters and produce English sounds, but this knowledge does not seem to help them develop as speakers of the language. Instead they have to relearn new sounds and uses of the letters that becomes very confusing. To illustrate how the English alphabet can be taught in a manner that coincides with the Japanese learning style, please refer to the corresponding lessons located in the following chapter.

If something as simple as teaching the ABC song results in a culture clash, it becomes very apparent that the ALT will unconsciously teach in a manner that may contradict how previous learning has occurred for the Japanese student. It is for this reason that the JTE is instrumental in making the team-teaching endeavor a success. While an ALT may be capable of teaching a class or English activity in a dominant role, it will not present the students with the best learning environment. That can only be done by the JTE and the ALT using synergy in the team-taught classroom, as illustrated in the next section.

For the ALT who is consistently asked to "go solo," it would be most advantageous to write personal observations of the class and the reactions of the students while or immediately after teaching. If something did not go as expected, make a note of it and then after class ask the JTE what they believe transpired. ALTs should be as specific as possible in explaining their observations to the JTE. For example, ALTs could begin by stating what they thought would happen in the classroom during a certain planned activity and then state what they observed actually to happen. Then by asking the JTE why this occurred, the JTE will become an active participant in the team teaching experience and be able to share with the ALT their own teaching methodology and the learning preferences of their students.

To review, culture clash occurs when students' innate learning style clashes with the mode of teaching used by the ALT. The student feels frustration that learning does not progress in the manner that they have grown accustomed to and the ALT also experiences frustration when classes do not progress as originally planned. The key component for resolving culture clash is to utilise the expertise of the JTE. When both the JTE and the ALT are working in tandem to develop creative lesson plans, the ideal learning environment emerges. This is to use synergy in the team-taught classroom.

Synergy

The American Heritage Dictionary defines synergy as "the interaction of two or more agents or forces so that their combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual effects." This potential exists in team-teaching as well. If the JTE and the ALT can utilise synergy in the team-taught classroom, the result will be a learning environment that far surpasses merely having two teachers in the classroom. This is because by using synergy, creativity will flourish and the teachers as well as the students will be exposed to new learning opportunities. In the discussion of paralysis, the human tape recorder syndrome, and culture clash, I have made suggestions that could lead to resolution and bring the teachers to the threshold of using synergy. When synergy is present, the JTE as well as the ALT should feel that they are learning as well as contributing to the teaching experience. I have learned far more by having the opportunity to team-teach than I could ever have learned being an independent teacher. Furthermore, I believe that the teachers that I have had the honor to work with would also agree that the same holds true for them.

As I have stated before there is no one correct way of learning. We all have a unique learning style that is in part a product of the school system in which we were raised. However as Rossi -Le (1995) states:

using teaching strategies that are compatible with student learning styles should not be the sole approach to classroom instruction. Students need to build on the learning styles and strategies that they currently use and to experiment with new methods. They need to learn how to compensate for their style and strategy weaknesses in order to broaden the scope of their approaches to learning.

Team teaching does indeed have the potential to broaden the students' scope of learning. However, this can only be accomplished when the ALT is working in tandem with the JTE.

Team-teachers are the key

Every teacher has unique talents and abilities that he or she brings to the classroom. When teachers represent different cultures, those talents and abilities are multiplied. In the case of the elementary school English classroom, the HRT is the most aware of the abilities and characteristics of the students based on daily contact with the students. However, the HRT may have little or no training in teaching English as a second language. For this reason, there may be a JTE who has expertise in teaching English to Japanese students. The JTE will know what aspects of speaking and learning English prove to be the most difficult for Japanese students. Naturally, the ALT has the ability to speak English as his or her native tongue as well as share with the Japanese students experiences and information about the world outside Japan.

When these variables can all be combined with synergy the result is a new classroom experience that is far better than the simple sum of the elements. This is because as the teachers work together, they too begin to see things differently and become learners themselves once again. They can then develop professional capabilities through creativity that they did not possess before the team teaching experience.

For example, when making a lesson plan, the JTE will have a certain approach in mind based on the abilities of the students in the class. The ALT however, may have a very different idea about how to approach the very same lesson plan. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that a proper amount of time be reserved for lesson planning. In fact, team teaching actually begins with the writing of the lesson plan.

The importance of effective communication has been stressed throughout this discussion.

Prior to planning the day's lesson, the team-teachers should have had at least two chances to communicate; once when the ALT called the school to express her/his pleasure at the opportunity to visit the school, and second when the ALT and JTE began to establish rapport through small talk upon the ALT's arrival at the school. If at all possible, it is best to wait for the JTE to begin the discussion of the lesson plan as he or she has the most knowledge about the upcoming class and should serve in a leadership role.

Once the lesson plan is presented, the team-teachers should discuss how they would present the lesson if they were teaching individually. This will give each member involved in the team an opportunity to hear a different viewpoint or perspective on the same lesson material. Then the teachers can brainstorm together to unite these varied approaches into one unified presentation. It is very important that no teacher "give up" an idea completely. However, the individual teacher's ideas should be adapted based on the input of the other members of the team.

Steps to incorporate synergy

To give a specific example, as part of their Japanese language study, elementary school students learn tongue twisters. This is a fun activity for the students and they truly enjoy these classroom lessons. It also provides an opportunity to create an English activity based upon this knowledge. The students could teach the ALT Japanese tongue twisters and then attempt to learn an English tongue twister.

Let us look at how synergy could be used in formatting a lesson plan on the topic of tongue twisters. After establishing effective communication, the team-teachers would turn to the day's activity. In the initial discussion of the lesson plan, the JTE may ask the ALT to choose a favorite tongue twister. For this example, let us use, "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers." If this were the end of the lesson planning discussion, the team-taught lesson would not be successful. The ALT would find it very difficult to try and encourage the students to repeat the tongue twister even with assistance from the JTE. The ALT would be frustrated with the lack of student response and the JTE would feel equally frustrated at a lesson that did not go as well as expected.

However, if the lesson planning continued to incorporate how tongue twisters are taught in the Japanese classroom, synergy would emerge. The first step would be for the ALT to self-reflect on how he or she learned tongue twisters. I have no recollection of learning tongue twisters in school. Rather I just heard friends reciting them and tried to join along. Perhaps I tried to read aloud a classic tongue twister collection such as *Fox in Socks* (Giesel, 1965). Therefore, my approach to teaching a tongue twister would be simply to have the students mimic my pronunciation and join along.

However, as synergy is defined as the interaction of two or more agents, the next step is for the JTE to respond and build upon the ALT's experience. The JTE should begin by relating how he or she actually taught lessons on tongue twisters in the classroom stressing the amount of student involvement and how students reacted to the lessons. He or she should also inform the ALT which English sounds are difficult for Japanese students to produce and the overall reaction students have to speaking aloud in English. Once each teacher has had the opportunity to present their unique perspective, the team can begin to meld these ideas together to create a lesson that will seem both familiar to the students and yet challenge new ways of learning. Thus, the collective lesson plan produced by the team-teachers becomes more beneficial to the students than a lesson taught by any one of the individual teachers.

A sample lesson play using synergy

A lesson using synergy for teaching tongue twisters could begin with the JTE reviewing with the students what they have been learning in class. Then the JTE could choose a few students who would try to teach the ALT a Japanese tongue twister. The whole class will get involved in this activity and the ALT will naturally fumble at first but may indeed succeed eventually. In this way, the ALT has provided an excellent role model for the students about speaking English. They do not have to be perfect. Furthermore, this corresponds to MEXT's definition on foreign language activities in elementary schools that their primary purpose is to foster a positive attitude toward communication—not to teach a language. The students will now be interested

and intrigued to learn if there are tongue twisters in English as well.

However, this interest will quickly fade if students are asked to repeat after the ALT or are read a story such as *Fox in Socks*. Japanese students need a role model to copy and so the teaching of “Peter Piper” should begin with providing students a role model for pronouncing the letter “p.” The ALT could demonstrate that the correct pronunciation of the sound “p” results in a burst of air that can be felt on the palm of one’s own hand when it is held in front of the mouth. Students may or may not understand this point so a more effective modeling behavior is necessary.

All students will have a package of tissue in their pocket. The ALT can demonstrate the proper way to pronounce the letter “p” by holding a sheet of tissue in front of his or her own mouth. When the tissue moves, the letter “p” has been pronounced correctly. Students can thus easily self-check their own pronunciation by observing if their tissues move or not. If the tissue remains stationary, they will need to try again until they can successfully pronounce “p.”

While the students are watching their tissues, the ALT can now try single words such as “Peter.” Although it is ideal for the students to understand what they are saying, for the purpose of this exercise it is not necessary for the students to understand the meaning of each individual word. Rather they are working on making English sounds in the correct manner. Little by little, the ALT can increase the number of words that the students are to repeat in unison until the students are saying the entire tongue twister. At this point, the tissues can be removed and students will now be ready for direct eye contact with the ALT in learning the tongue twister. The fear of making a mistake has already been removed and students will be eager to say aloud the words they are already familiar with through the warm-up exercise.

In this example, students received the benefit of both a native Japanese approach to learning (the manner in teaching the ALT the Japanese tongue twister) as well as a new approach to learning (self-assessment of pronunciation while practicing the English tongue twister). The team-teachers provided a lesson that was enjoyable for the students because they felt comfortable in the learning environment even when being asked to take a risk and go beyond their traditional mode of processing information. The team-teachers also provided a model for the students that allowed for making mistakes while learning in a non-threatening environment.

This is just one example of how synergy can be used in the team-taught classroom. Such an approach can work for any lesson as long as the members of the team each express their unique knowledge and abilities and do not give up these ideas. Rather, the ideas are revamped, taking into account the knowledge and abilities of the other members of the team as well as the students themselves. When you are teaching using synergy, creativity flows and that energy provides the best learning environment for the students.

For the JTE, working with an ALT can be uncomfortable at first. Through the use of empathy, the ALT can appreciate the apprehension of the JTE and actively seek ways to develop effective communication techniques. As the team-teachers work together using synergy, they will all benefit from each other. In the specific case of the JTE, they will become more aware of the unique skills and knowledge that they do indeed bring to the team-taught classroom and be able to enhance their capabilities. In fact, second language acquisition research has shown that, “teachers who have a reasonably realistic appreciation of their target language skills will be more likely to seek out improvement opportunities while at the same time making the most of their existing abilities” (Horwitz, 1996).

Frequent interaction with the ALT will result in the JTE becoming more aware of their existing abilities as a classroom teacher. Naturally the JTE will also become more aware of their English language capability. Even if they are not entirely proficient in communicative English, by working together with an ALT, the JTE will develop realistic expectations about team-teaching that can become a classroom reality. As team-teachers enhance their professional capabilities, they will also be encouraged to seek ways in which to incorporate the new

teaching methodology and approaches to learning they have found through the use of synergy. Therefore, the ALT can serve as a catalyst to improve learning for not only the students in the classroom but for their teachers as well.

Conclusion

This article began by introducing what seemed to be a difficult task facing Japanese elementary school teachers today. Without proper training, they are being asked to conduct learning activities in a language that many have only been exposed to as a student. Furthermore, in some cases, they are even being asked to team-teach with a native speaker of the target language, which sometimes accelerates feelings of ineptitude. However, the very interaction of working with an ALT has the potential to raise the JTE's self-awareness of personal teaching capabilities as well as providing encouragement to seek out additional learning opportunities.

Three of the four prevalent learning environments, paralysis, the human tape recorder syndrome, and culture clash, were defined and strategies to overcome unfavourable outcomes for these team-taught classroom experiences were given. Furthermore, the concept of synergy and its use in the team-taught classroom were introduced along with specific lesson planning procedures. It is the hope of the authors of this article that with the knowledge presented here, team teaching will indeed realise its true potential. Based on my own years of team teaching, the effective use of synergy in the team-taught classroom is the key that unites various cultural perspectives and provides students with the best possible learning experience. It is the baton that allows even an ordinary musician the ability to conduct an orchestra in perfect harmony.

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Teaching Approaches



AN INTRODUCTION TO SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION FOR ALTS

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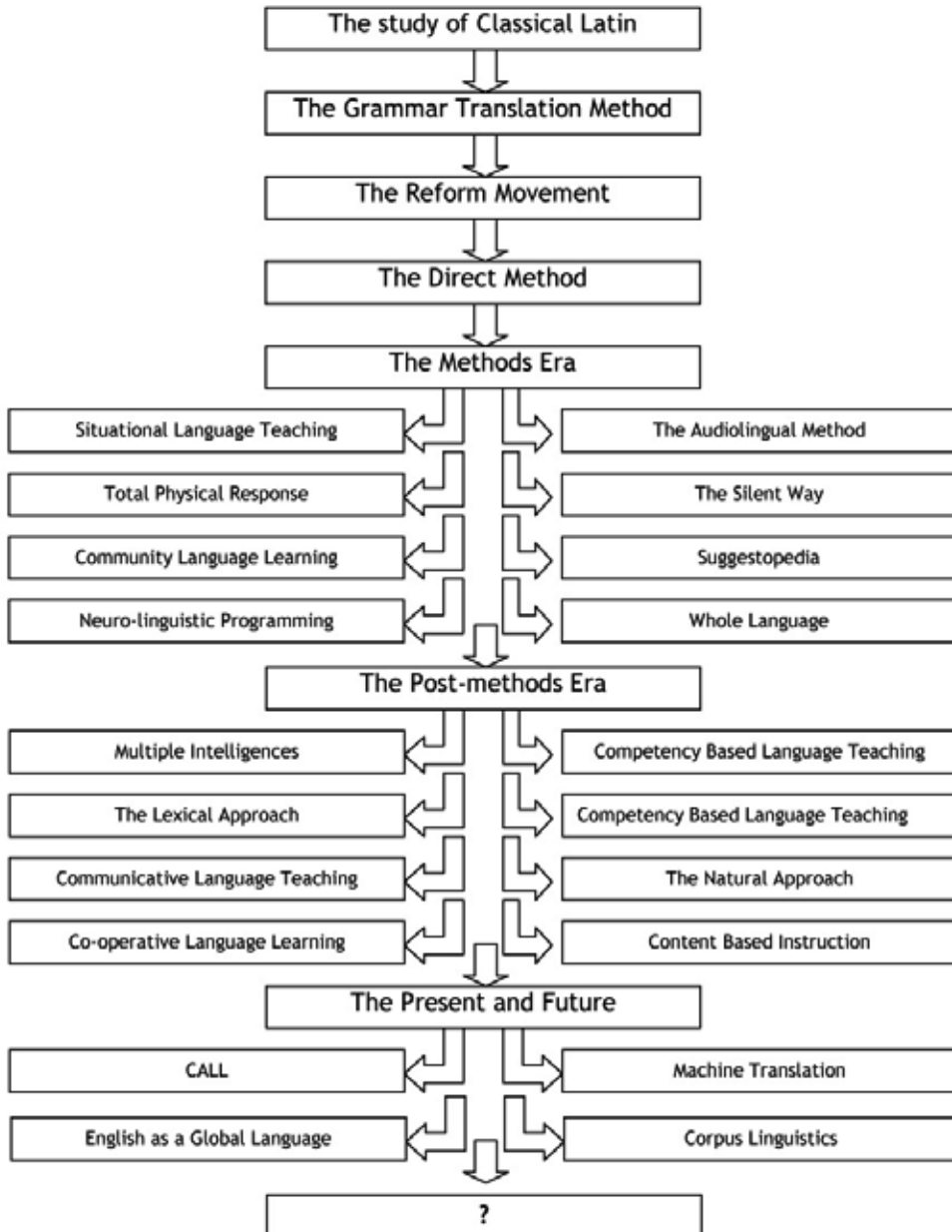
The following is a pedagogical guide to provide Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) with a general blueprint that will assist them in their planning and designing of lessons and curriculum in the Japanese High School and Junior High School. The purpose of this guide is to assist ALTs in the development of lessons and curriculum in situations where they are given extra freedom and control over lesson planning. In such cases, ALTs with little to no experience or knowledge in language teaching may feel overwhelmed and perhaps even frustrated. Basic questions which may arise include: “What should I teach?” and “How should I teach?” This guide endeavors to answer such questions through discussing relevant SLA theories with the hope that readers will be left with a better sense of how to best design their lessons and activities to benefit their students’ learning.

To begin, it is first important to look at the history of different theories, methods and approaches to better grasp where we currently stand in the world of language teaching. I have attached a brief history of language teaching along with summaries of the most popular language theories and teaching methods. The following visual history and summary list was created by Ben Shearon, lecturer at Tohoku University.

A Brief History of Language Teaching

Modern techniques for teaching foreign languages draw on a rich and convoluted history, originated in the study of Classical Latin in Europe and passing through several stages. Different countries, organizations and teachers prefer different methods, and almost all of the theories and approaches shown in the diagram below still carry weight somewhere.

Figure 1 is an attempt at displaying this history visually:



Initial approaches

The Study of Classical Latin

From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, Latin was studied in Europe as an intellectual exercise, with students memorising grammar and vocabulary with the aim of reading and writing accurately. Students spent their time committing declensions and conjugations to memory, and wrestling with grammar and rhetoric.

The Grammar Translation Method

The grammar translation method appeared after modern languages (French, German, English) started to be taught in schools. Teachers of these new languages fell back on the traditional way of teaching Latin, and so the fundamentals of the language classes did not change.

The grammar translation method is dull and monotonous for students, for easy for teachers to implement and teach. It is still widely used, even though there is no theory that justifies it or that “attempts to relate it to issues in linguistics, psychology, or educational theory” (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

The Direct Method

Also known as the Natural Method or the Berlitz Method, the Direct Method grew out of dissatisfaction with previous methods of instruction. According to it, classroom instruction is carried out entirely in the target language, preferably by native speakers.

Its drawbacks include the need for skilled native speakers as teachers and the rigidity of trying to run classes completely in the target language when sometimes a quick lapse into L1 would solve problems more quickly.

Situational Language Teaching

Situational Language Teaching emphasised oral practice, grammar, and sentence patterns. It also introduced the extremely influential P-P-P lesson model (presentation, practice, production) that is still visible in schools all over Japan.

The method consists of using concrete objects, pictures, and *realia* along with actions and gestures to demonstrate the meaning of new items. This allows teachers to dispense with explanation or L1.

The Methods Era

Following the Second World War, and up to the 1980s, EFL was dominated by a succession of methods that claimed to have the answers to the problem of how to teach. While none of them provided a satisfactory complete solution, many have useful elements.

The Audiolingual Method (the Army Method)

An intensive, oral-based approach developed by the US Army to train interpreters. It involves memorising dialogs and doing language drills. It went out of fashion due to attacks on its theoretical foundations and disappointment in its results.

Total Physical Response

Created by James Ascher, a professor of psychology, TPR is an excellent complementary technique, especially for beginners' and children's classes. As a self-contained method, however, it proved inadequate at intermediate and advanced levels.

The Silent Way

Based on the premise that teachers should be silent while students should produce language in the classroom, the Silent Way depends on coloured wooden rods and pronunciation charts to aid students in figuring out language with minimal teacher input.

Community Language Learning

Based on counseling and psychology, CLL involves students and teachers forming a community that works together to figure out the target language. Teachers need special training in counselling techniques.

Whole Language

Whole Language is based on “authenticity” of language. It is characterised by only using authentic texts, having meaningful interaction, and doing exercises with real purpose.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)

NLP is a set of working principles for directing or guiding therapeutic change, which have been adapted for EFL.

Integrating Approaches

In the 1980s and 90s, the EFL world slowly moves to a new approach: the eclectic approach. Self-contained methods with all the answers had been discredited, and the teachers came to realise that they were the best arbiters of what worked in their classroom.

From then on, the eclectic method has involved taking effective techniques and integrating them into a personalised approach.

Multiple Intelligences

Based on the work of Howard Gardner, MI refers to a learner-based philosophy that characterises human intelligence and having multiple dimensions that should be acknowledged in education. He lists linguistics, logical/mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily/kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and natural intelligences.

The Lexical Approach

The Lexical Approach takes the view that the building blocks of language learning and communication are not grammar, functions, or notions, but lexis (vocabulary).

Competence Based Language Learning

Competence Based Education focuses on the outcomes or outputs of learning. It is a kind of performance based teaching: looking at what learners will be able to do with language, regardless of how they learned it. Used in ESL contexts (particularly Australia’s Migrant Education Program).

Communicative Language Learning

Communicative Language Learning is another vague and broad “approach” that commands widespread support. It is based upon a communicative model of language and language use, where learners are involved as much as possible in real communication (information gaps, etc.). The goal is communicative competence, the ability to use the linguistic system effectively and appropriately.

The Natural Approach

Similar to Communicative Language Learning, the Natural Approach was developed by Tracy Terrell and Stephen Krashen, who refer to it as a communicative approach.

It focuses on the difference between acquisition (unconscious language uptake) and learning (conscious language uptake) and attempts to encourage the former.

There are two other major theories involved:

- The input hypothesis states that we learn best by understanding language slightly beyond our level
- The affective filter hypothesis states that we learn best if relaxed and comfortable.

Cooperative Language Learning

Cooperative Language Learning is an approach to teaching that makes minimum use of cooperative activities involving pairs and small groups of learners in the classroom.

It is designed to foster cooperation, critical thinking skills, and develop communicative competence.

Content Based Instruction

In Content Based Instruction, teaching is based around the content or information that students will acquire. It is based on the following two principles:

- People learn language more successfully when they use it as a means of acquiring information rather than as an end in itself
- CBI better reflects learner's needs for learning a second language

Task Based Language Learning

Task Based Language Learning focuses on the processes that students attempt rather than the content or outcomes. It is strongly linked to Communicative Language Learning.

Recent Developments

Recent developments, especially in technology, hint at revolutions to come in the world of EFL, but it seems likely that any innovations would be integrated into current theoretical frameworks rather than embraced as replacements.

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

One of the hottest areas in EFL recently, CALL has been further enhanced in the spread of broadband internet and online class management technologies. It seems likely that computers will continue to play increasingly important roles in language learning, whether through advanced in language learning software or by facilitating the development of virtual classrooms.

Corpus Linguistics

Corpus Linguistics uses computers to analyse huge databases of language (corpora) and determine word frequencies and usages. It has been used to make a new generation of dictionaries and is set to revolutionise how we think about language.

Machine Translation

Not so much teaching, but rapid advances in machine translation could conceivably eliminate the need to learn foreign languages at some points in the future.

It is important to learn SLA theories because they help to guide teachers in lesson planning and to choose appropriate methods and approaches. Theories also help to answer the why and how in lesson planning and to validate what they do in the classroom.

CHOOSING AN APPROACH

The Approach

Note: An approach is a cohesive set of theoretical and practical beliefs. It is the why in language teaching and it provides certain principles. As for method, it is the how in language teaching; it is the application of the aspects of an approach.

You may favor a single approach or method for teaching, but I encourage ALTs to borrow ideas from a variety of teaching methods and approaches to establish a desired framework. First, it is important to realise that communicative competence does not hold the same importance in Japan, as the focus for learners is on preparing themselves to meet the challenges of the strict requirements of university entrance exams which give saliency to lexical and grammatical knowledge rather than English communication. Consequently, the grammar-translation method is still present despite the push towards a more communicative approach. Current curriculum still gives weight to reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar leaving listening and especially speaking on a much lower pedestal. Lessons also tend to be teacher-centered rather than student-centered.

In an attempt to balance this curriculum weight scale, I have put together a teaching approach which borrows from several different approaches to provide ALTs with a framework from which they can build and design lessons and curriculum for their students. Using such a framework is most helpful when deciding on what to teach, what activities to use, and why. ALTs are encouraged to research and explore other theories and methods to create their own communicative curriculum to complement MEXT goals.

SUGGESTED TEACHING APPROACH

The suggested approach is a multifaceted approach incorporating ideas from the Communicative and Natural Approach to Language Teaching, the Lexical Approach, Task-based Language Teaching, Social Constructivist Theory and Multiple Intelligences Theory. The key principles can be summarised as follows:

Language is communication

Activities should aim at promoting interaction and be designed to focus on completing tasks through negotiation of meaning with teachers facilitating learner interaction. The aim is communicative competence. In this approach language is used in real context; grammar is taught both deductively and inductively; the target language is a vehicle for classroom communication as oppose to an object of study; the students' L1 or native language can be used if necessary and a variety of methods or approaches can be applied. Fluency is important; accuracy is not of importance; students are free to make errors since the goal is meaningful communication; drilling is discouraged. It is a learner-centered approach in which students are given the opportunity to express their ideas and opinions.

Acquisition versus learning

Acquisition, according to Stephen Krashen, is a subconscious process whereas learning is a conscious process. Krashen believed that second language learners should attempt to acquire linguistic rules subconsciously and in a natural way much like a child acquires language.

Furthermore, the acquirer must receive comprehensible input through reading or hearing language that is slightly above their current level. Also, Krashen discusses what he terms an affective filter. A learner who is tense, anxious, or bored will block out input, making it unavailable for acquisition. Thus, depending on the learner's state of mind, the filter limits what is acquired. The filter will be up when the learner is self-conscious or unmotivated. It will be down when the learner is motivated or feeling relaxed.

For more information on Krashen's Input Hypothesis:

Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Learning and Acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon.

<http://fredshannon.blogspot.com/2005/11/input-hypothesis.html>

The art of language instruction

There are two popular approaches to language instruction. The first is the Present, Practice, Produce (PPP) paradigm and the second is the Task-based approach. The former is a much more direct approach which involves the teacher first presenting the new language and demonstrating its use. This is followed by controlled practice coupled with a shift from teacher-centeredness to student-centeredness. Finally, students practice what they have learned with student talk-time at its maximum.

Conversely, In task-based learning, the content students are to learn develops as students progress through a given task. First, the ALT and JTE explain how they will complete the task and review any vocabulary or grammar that will be useful. Next, the teachers monitor and record language problems met during the task. Finally, the teacher reviews the problems that students encountered during the task and has them practice again. The task-based approach is a smart choice for students who are motivated and work well independently. It uses language as a vehicle for authentic real world needs allowing students to experiment with their store of knowledge rather than just practicing one pre-selected item. I recommend ALTs to use this latter approach when possible.

For more information on task-based language teaching:

Jane Willis, *A Framework for Task-Based Learning*, Longman ELT

Example of a Task-based Lesson:

Task-based grammar teaching – tips and activities by Lindsay Clandfield

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?docid=144974>

Language is like a tapestry

The development of oral and listening skills is a priority; however, reading and writing skills should not be ignored. Oxford's analogy of a tapestry is perhaps best in portraying the complexity and importance of integration in ESL/EFL curriculum and instruction. Oxford aptly describes integration as a tapestry intricately woven from many strands in such a way as to create, ideally, a tapestry that is strong, colourful and beautiful. She argues that one of the most important of these strands consists of the four primary skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Oxford posits "the skill strand of the tapestry leads to optimal ESL/EFL communication when the skills are interwoven". She stresses this integrated-skill approach as opposed to the compartmentalization of skills or what she terms the segregated-skill approach. In short, curriculum that offers the potential for a variety of skills to be used during classroom activities is an ideal curriculum.

The L1 as a teaching and learning tool

JTEs know the learner's native language (L1) which gives them the possibility to make L1 an ally to enhance learning. Therefore, activities involving L1 and L2 comparison and translation are extremely helpful in the learning process. Using the L1 is also beneficial when explaining difficult concepts. The use of L1 as a means of instruction should be kept at a minimum, but is expected more at lower stages of learning in order to offer learners affective support and increase their self-confidence.

Lexical Theory

"Without grammar little can be conveyed; without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed." David

Wilkins

Since you are in a fortunate situation which allows you to create materials for monolingual students, the materials can expose learners to an exceptional quantity of vocabulary. This brings us to our next question, "How does one teach vocabulary?" One possible approach to teaching vocabulary is what is termed, The Lexical Approach. This approach is based on a computer analysis of language which identifies the most common and hence, most useful words, in the language and their various uses.

Here are some important points to consider:

Words typically co-occur with other words. These co-occurrences (or chunks) are an aid to fluency.

Example:

By the way
If I were you
out of your mind
I know what you mean
terrible accident
That's a great idea

Learners pass through a stage where they use a high percentage of prefabricated chunks. *How are you? Fine, thank you. And you?*

Teaching vocabulary as a list of isolated words de-contextualises language – context is extremely important!

Fluent and appropriate language use requires collocational knowledge. According to Pawley and Syder (1983) the best explanation of how language users can choose the most appropriate ways to say things from a large range of possible options (native-like selection), is that units of language of clause length or longer are stored as chunks in the memory. They suggest that this explanation means that most words are stored many times, once as an individual word and numerous times in larger stored chunks.

Memorised clauses and clause sequences make up a large percentage of the fluent stretches of speech heard in everyday conversation.

"It is our ability to use lexical phrases that helps us to speak with fluency. This prefabricated speech has both the advantages of more efficient retrieval and of permitting speakers (and learners) to direct their attention to the larger structure of the discourse, rather than keeping it narrowly focused on individual words as they are produced" (Nattinger and DeCarrico, 1992).

Finally, syllabuses should include only maximally useful language items. Vocabulary items should reflect the needs and interests of your students. Focus on the words they need to communicate effectively in English. Also, phonological aspects should be dealt with in the material and contain only those especially difficult for Japanese learners.

For example, Japanese learners tend to confuse the phonemes /r/ and /l/ and /b/ and /v/. Thus, emphasis should be given to these.

For more information regarding the lexical approach:

Lewis, Michael (1993), *The Lexical Approach*, Hove: Language Teaching Publications.

Lewis, Michael (1997). *Implementing the Lexical Approach: Putting Theory Into Practice*. Hove: Language Teaching Publications.

Excellent Speakers and Listeners.
Work best through lectures, recordings and discussions.

Logical-mathematical intelligence ("number/reasoning smart")
Above average aptitude for problem solving.
Work best through classifications and problem solving activities.

Visual/Spatial intelligence ("picture smart")
Imaginative and creative.
Good at reading body language.
Work best through drawing and visual diagrams.

Bodily-Kinesthetic intelligence ("body smart")
Understands sensory material from hands on experience.
Work best through lessons requiring movement.

Musical intelligence ("music smart")
Highly responsive to aural stimuli.
Work best while listening to music.

Interpersonal intelligence ("people smart")
Sociable and excellent at working in groups.
Work best through collaboration and cooperation.

Intrapersonal intelligence ("self smart")
Reflective and independent thinkers.
Understand their own strengths and weaknesses.
Work best through self-evaluations and individually paced projects.

Naturalist intelligence ("nature smart")
Excellent understanding of biology and the natural world.
Work best through "show and tell" and field trips.

For more information on the M.I Theory:

<http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/concept2class/mi/index.html>

As ALTs, we can apply M.I. theory by simply creating lessons that aim at several intelligences. If you are having trouble teaching certain students through traditional linguistic instruction you may want to adjust your lesson to facilitate effective learning.

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TEACHING YOUNG LEARNERS

Trevor Laughlin (Tochigi Prefecture, 2001-04)

The Elementary EFL Classroom and You: Looking at the Waters Before You Try to Swim

As a mature adult, I suspect you never thought you would be intimidated by seven-year-old kids. But for many new ALTs who have never taught in elementary school (ES) before, it can be a frightening situation. Foreign language activities are now a compulsory part of the official elementary curriculum, so this is now territory that many ALTs are likely to encounter.

Elementary school foreign language education is a relatively new phenomenon in Japan. Before that, it was primarily introduced at the junior high school level. In 2000, MEXT began to consider elementary English education- at first in select schools only. This move was mirroring new policies from Taiwan and South Korea in their education systems (Kelly, 2004).

In 2002, English conversation activities were introduced as part of integrated study periods. 22,526 elementary schools jumped on the proverbial bandwagon with “some sort” of program; a figure representing 88.3% of all primary schools in Japan (Tabuchi, 2007). ES students in these programs received on average 14-15 hours of English language instruction per year. As of 2006, the percentage of schools with English activities increased to 95.8%. Since April 2011, Elementary Schools are required to implement compulsory “Foreign Language Activities” for the fifth and sixth graders which would focus on listening and speaking, bring hours of exposure to approximately 35 per year. Accordingly, the number of contracting organisations assigning ALTs to Elementary School as a main part of their teaching duties has also increased.

However, these are still uncharted waters. You are here as brave voyagers or frontiersmen-trailblazers for those that follow. What you will find in this section is a collection of linguistic maps, charts and discoveries that previous explorer/researchers have created to aid you. Teaching young learners (YLS) is a challenging task that requires considerable planning and care. What I hope you can find here is a basic grounding in the more commonly accepted theories that dominate the TEFL field.

Understanding the Young Learner: Key Theorists and Theories

Three theorists have had an overriding influence on our understanding of young learners. The first is developmental psychologist Jean Piaget. At its core, Piagetian theory describes the child as an active learner. Any knowledge the child has is actively constructed through the child’s interaction with the world around it: by trying out theories, testing rules and exploratory behaviour. The child is a being that is actively trying to understand the world around it and, in our second language context, asks questions and wishes to know things. They try to make sense of the world by developing theories and rules and then testing them to see if they are correct. The ALT becomes the source of this feedback and it becomes the language instructor’s job to help students understand that foreign language can be a means to gain access to additional information; not simply an additional subject at school.

Piaget sees the child as an active learner alone in the world. In contrast, Lev Vygotsky sees the child as an active learner *in a world full of people*; learning taking place in a social environment (Cameron 2001). The implications for this are quite obvious for language training- that the teacher must create a communicative social environment for English learning to occur.

In Vygotsky’s body of work, measuring success or intelligence is not a question of what a child can do, but instead *what they can do with skilled help*. Consider a baby learning to use a spoon. A parent can do a number of things to help the baby achieve success. They could feed the infant themselves, saving time and effort- but not helping those skills develop. Then again, it is a heavy spoon and the child hasn’t had much practice. Being a mediator involves

gauging just how much help the baby needs. Do we need to show them how to hold the spoon? Is it enough to simply load the spoon for the baby, or should we support the spoon on the way in letting the baby pull it with what ever strength it has? This assistance has been described by **Jerome Bruner** (in Cameron, 2001) as *scaffolding*. In the communicative classroom teachers/ALTs are mediators. It is their role to provide as much or as little support as necessary in order to perform a communicative task.

To do this, Vygotsky says we must get to know our learners to determine their *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD): the student's current level of language capability and the potential level they can reach with assistance. Each child has their own ZPD. Some will require a lot of assistance to complete a task; for others, it will be easy. And, in a class of 30+ students, there can be quite a range of levels which ALTs must accommodate.

In the Classroom: Tying Theory to Practice

As McKeon (1994) writes:

The first thing that the research on language acquisition has taught us to remember about language learning, ... is that people learn language because they are in real situations communicating about important and interesting things

(in Cameron, p. 16).

So invariably you will pose the question, "Well this was quite interesting, but what does it have to do with my JET classroom?" If you think about it, these theories should not only influence what lessons you create, but the way you plan your lessons, the way you evaluate your success and even how you behave in class.

From the third key theorist, Jerome Bruner's standpoint, *scaffolding* is one of the most important devices that a teacher can help lead children to an answer. To properly scaffold, Wood (1998, in Cameron, 2001) suggests teachers adopt some of the following techniques. Try to make children interested in the task. A teachers' enthusiasm is prerequisite in this. If you do not feel the task is fun, the children will pick up on it and react accordingly. Be simplistic in your task design and instruction. Break it down into smaller steps and demonstrate it to the students. Demonstration is incredibly important in filling in gaps in the language instruction. Pay attention to what the class is doing and keep them on track towards the task.

However, Bruner and Cameron (2001) highlight the significance of formats and routines in the young ESL/EFL environments. Routine is incredibly important in the classroom especially in how it facilitates the ZPD. Routines provide a base of familiarity to start from, but also a springboard from which to gradually grow the complexity of the language. It builds an idea, not only of expectations, but of a gradual movement from the "comfortable" known to the "new" unknown which encompasses the task of the day. For young learners, language is introduced orally and aurally. Then it is orally practiced and acquired- speaking becoming the primary site of language learning. Routines, may take the form of simple phrases like, "Can I see your drawing?" or "I am fine, how are you?" It provides students with an opportunity to predict meaning and intention, but also a way to add variation using more complicated language.

McAllister and Acton (private communications) recommend teaching collocations rather than individual words, so that individual word meanings do not lead to confusion.

Routine: "Can I see your drawing?" (collocation phrase + object)

Variant 1: "Can I see your book?" (collocation phrase + object)

Variant 2: "Can I see your drawing from yesterday?" (collocation phrase + object + time marker)

Variant 3: "Can I see Megumi's book?" (collocation phrase + possessive + object)

Now let us look at this example in relation to the ZPD. Assuming that all students understand the routine, it is most likely that variant 1 should be accessible to them. Scaffolding for new vocabulary can be done easily through the use of *realia* (i.e. a real object or prop- a book) by pointing to a book of yours. Variant 2 may be out of the ZPD of some students unfamiliar with time referents. Model it by using a calendar (either English or Japanese). Variant 3, involving possessive pronouns, again can be demonstrated through repetition and through modelling. By picking up students books and repeating phrases like “This is Megumi’s/Daisuke’s/Shinji’s book.”, students will clue-in on the idea of possessives.

Cameron (2001) cautions us to remember to remain focused on our task’s goals and attend to what is relevant. Consider the example of possessive pronouns above. Judging the ability of each class by yourself, only you can determine how far you could push the limits of your lesson. Ask yourself, should you try to introduce time markers as well as possessive pronouns in the same class and if so, how much will they retain? So too, relevance is called into question. Is it more important that they pronounce the new words correctly, or that they master the idea of possession? Depending on how you define your task goal, your answer will vary.

So, what is the task of the ALT at the elementary level? We will come back to that discussion later in the curriculum and lesson planning section of our discussion. First, however, we must understand the audience to whom we are teaching.

Contrastive Analysis

The Languages and the Learners: Being Young

The rules for high school and even junior high school teaching are not ones that are universally applicable to the case of young learners (YL) and very young learners (VYL). And this should influence your frame of mind when walking into these classrooms. The five years of difference between a 5-year old in kindergarten and a 10-year old in grade five or six makes for an entirely different educational creature.

Scott and Ytreberg, in their text *Teaching English to Children* (1990) describe the students you will be interacting with and the typical limitations they will have. For all ages, their typical capabilities (in both L1 and L2) can include being able to:

1. Talk about what they are currently doing
2. Talk about what they have seen and heard
3. Argue for something and justify themselves (However, in the context of Japan, being different often puts one at odds with the group- so be careful what you are asking them to do or say)
4. Use basic logic and imagination

Other characteristics can include:

1. A lack of knowledge of rules that govern the world at large
2. They understand situations more quickly than they do language
3. Thinking in simple logical order- what is said first is what is done first (saying, “Before I eat (Y), I wash my hands (X)” can result in students doing Y + X rather than X + Y)
4. Short attention spans (Cameron, 2001; Reilly & Ward, 1997)
5. Problems differentiating between fact and fiction
6. Children love to work alone in the company of others- working as individuals while others are present. However, group work and sharing can be difficult for them as they have a hard time seeing others’ points of view.
7. Children will not always ask questions if they do not understand something. This is particularly true in Japan- where students are sometimes encouraged to listen and not ask questions (Aspinall in Cameron, 2001).
8. Are incapable of deciding what they want to learn for themselves
9. Always want to play and take the “work” of playing very seriously

ALT Considerations: Very Young Learners (5-7 years old)

For those ALTs attending kindergartens, VYLs (very young learners) under the age of 7 present a unique set of problems and opportunities that must be considered when planning lessons.

Critical period and age:

1. Young children 7-8 pay more attention to the sound of the language (musical nature) than word order.
2. Acquisition comes primarily through hearing, experiencing and speaking lots of English, much like they acquire their L1 (Cameron, 2001; Slattery & Willis, 2001)
3. Learning comes through directed play- at this age they are not capable of organising their learning. Playing is not done for the conscious purpose of learning; the learning that comes is incidental.
4. Language as play. Let the pupils talk amongst themselves. Make up rhymes and songs. They do not have to make sense. "Nonsense" talk is common in L1 language learning too. The point is to let them be comfortable handling the language. (Scott and Ytreberg, 1990) Let them internalise the rhythm of the language through music.
5. Cooperation and competition are powerful tools, especially when used in groups of children. Cooperative games are fun and many teachers shy away from competitive games where there will be losers.
6. Demonstration is pivotal to teaching students what you want them to learn.
7. Learning also comes through a variety of channels: watching, listening, imitating and doing are all viable teaching paths. (Kelly, personal communications; Slattery & Willis, 2001)
8. They enjoy routine and repetition but to a point. It not only gives them a sense of mastery, but also a good springboard to move into new areas. (Cameron, 2001; Slattery & Willis, 2001). Children do not want to be in control, they want structure.
9. Have very short attention spans. They need to be presented with variety and entertainment in their lessons. VYLs react to the moods of the teacher and non-verbal cues easily- so your enthusiasm must carry through.
10. Youngsters love playing with language sounds and are wonderful imitators. They focus on the sound and the melody of the word. Exaggerated expressions and singing goes a long way to encoding sounds in their memory.
11. Repetition and recycling of words/phrases in talk and play is all important as students probably have not been taught the basics of writing in their L1. Therefore most encoding will be oral or aural. Though some alphabet work can be started at this stage, not real writing should be considered.

Grammar will be learned implicitly, much like it does for native speakers, if they are exposed to sufficient amounts of English. You should include as little grammar instruction as possible- and even then only for older children. (Slattery & Willis, 2001; Scott and Ytreberg, 1990)
(Adapted from Slattery & Willis, 2001)

The Differences: Young Learners versus Very Young Learners

Young learners (Ys) in elementary school (aged eight and above), present a more developed set of characteristics in comparison to their younger counterparts:

1. Have clear views on the world and clear likes and dislikes
2. Can differentiate between fact and fiction
3. Are prone to asking questions (outside of school) and should be encouraged to do so (inside the classroom)
4. Are capable of making some of their own decisions about what they want to learn
5. Have the capacity to work in groups and share with others.
6. "Recent studies in brain development have found that between the ages of 5 and 9, children experience a burst of development in their right brain, which explains why they tend to be interested in global, physical, and musical activities. From 9 to 12, however, development shifts to the left brain, and as a result, fifth and sixth graders tend to be shyer, more rationalistic, and less interested in what they see as child-like." (Kelly, 2003, p4) It is around this time when puberty starts and students go through identity formation.

Developmental psychology has showed a shift in young learner learning styles from global learning to topic-centred, life-centred and cognitive learning around grade 5 and 6 (Kelly, 2003)

(Adapted from Slattery & Willis, 2001).

ALT Considerations: Young Learners (8-14 years old)

From an educational standpoint YLs represent a blend of characteristics that set them apart from both young adult learners and the kindergarten crowd (Adapted from Slattery & Willis, 2001). [Note: Japanese students enter junior high school during the year when they turn 13. These points apply to younger JHS students as well.]

1. Children aged 12-14 attend to cues on word order and are less sensitive to the rhythm and prosody (musical quality) of language. (Harley et al.)
2. Children you are teaching are learning to write in their own native tongue and have not mastered their own language yet. L2 teachers have the opportunity to teach students the rules of English before Japanese linguistic rules can come to interfere with the L2 acquisition.
3. These students are developing thinkers, very eager to explore, learn and test rules. Harness that inquisitive nature. Provide scaffolding to their learning to assist them in their exploration of language (Burner in Cameron, 2001). YLs should be encouraged to work out meanings for themselves. Explicit grammar explanation should be kept to a minimum.
4. Unlike VYLs, YLs can work with others, learn from others and be reliable enough to take responsibility for class activities and routines.
5. It is at this age that accent fossilisation (Acton, 1984) can be beaten. Learners typically acquire their unchangeable accents in and beyond their teen years. YLs stand the best chance of overcoming this problem- so oral work here is key.
6. Focus heavily on oral exercises on stress, intonation and rhythm. Japanese speaking rhythm (syllable timed) is quite different from English (stress timed). Teach students to vary intonation and stress in their speech. (Dale and Poms, 1994)

Students should be encouraged to read stories or engage in reading games. Exploration through simple creative writing presents wonderful possibilities for language exploration.

Aleda Krause is the head of the special interest group concerning young learners for the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT). Likewise, William and Susan Acton, both veterans in the field of EFL education in Japan and young learners have the following advice to offer specifically speaking on Japanese YLs and VYLs.

Japanese children:

1. Tend to be entertained by games at a much later stage than North American counterparts. A senior high school class will be highly entertained and focused playing a game of jeopardy for a 100 yen bag of candy that is shared among their team-mates. Elementary school students will put a serious amount of effort towards winning stickers, even at age 11.
2. Tend to be much less conscious of world affairs than North American counterparts.
3. Respond incredibly well to singing and song, and have an aptitude for choral singing
4. Have a surprisingly high capacity for memory and memorization. This feeds into a love of memory games which make excellent activities.
5. As a whole, tend to be very obedient to teacher instructions and respect the teacher as an authority figure.
6. Typically respond to confrontation with silence.
7. Enjoy tongue twisters
8. Japanese fifth and sixth graders are notorious for their lack of interest in English (Kelly, 2003) and need to be inspired to communicate.

Most young children need a break after 20 min due to their short attention spans. Simply getting up and fetching textbooks or materials can be enough to get more oxygen to the brain

giving them the energy to go on.

The Languages and the Learners: The Differences between Japanese and English

In the 1960s and 1970s, one popular theory called contrastive analysis, claimed that once the differences between 2 languages (the native language [L1] and the target language to be learned [L2]) could be mapped, language courses could be better designed to accommodate for these “natural errors”. In essence, proficiency in acquiring a L2 could be predicted depending on the differences between the L1 and the L2.

While scientific evidence never truly supported this theory in the end, it still provided a significant body of information from which teachers still benefit in identifying common errors.

When students become second language learners, they often try to understand the new language using their own language as a frame of reference. We term this cross-linguistic interference or transfer. Unsurprisingly, most YLs and VYLs will search for clues into understanding their L2 from their L1 (Cameron, 2001). Transfer typically occurs from L1 to L2. It can be both helpful and harmful to learning a new mode of communication- though “interference” is always considered negative.

Most junior and senior high school students learn to pronounce English with Japanese katakana approximations of English phonemes (basic units of speech sound). Unfortunately the range of phonemes generated in the pronunciation of Japanese is not wide enough to cover all the English sounds typically used (Ohata, 2004).

Secondly, we have the issue of language timing. Japanese is a syllable-timed language: one where each syllable is said with the same amount of time “tempo” as the next. English, if you think about it, is a stress timed language: the stressed words we say make the tempo of the sentence, and speakers will cram or stretch certain words to match the pace (Ohata, 2004).

Knowing in advance where these problems will occur will help you take a proactive stance to dealing with them. Here are some of the typical transfer problems that you may encounter in students from elementary to adult learners:

1. Japanese has only one liquid sound that exists between /l/ and /r/. As such, there is often no distinction between the two or a switch between the two.
2. Similar to Spanish in the lacking of the /v/ sound. It now has two accepted pronunciations, /b/ and /wh/ (i.e. Video becomes “bideo” or “whideo”).
3. Japanese speakers have a tendency to insert vowels particularly at the end of words ending in a consonant other than n, e.g. sound as “soundo.”
4. Articles like “the” and “a” are often dropped
5. The subject or object in a sentence may occasionally be dropped
6. There is no distinguishing between singular and plural
7. Orally reproducing the “-teen” and “-ty” sounds in numbers is difficult; ex 15/50
8. Confusion occurs with numbers larger than ten thousand because of the difference in the spacing (i.e. 123,456,789 becomes 億2345万6789)
9. The sound -si becomes -shi (basic = “bashic”, similar = “shimilar,” etc...)
10. This pronounced as s, sh, z or d, since Japanese lacks both /T/ and /D/. “Theater” might be pronounced with a /sh/
11. Schwa are often misrepresented as short /a/ sounds
12. Speech tends to be produced in a regular syllabic rhythm rather than the varied speeds seen in English speech, making each word sound disconnected.

There is a lack of, or incorrect, stressing of words in sentences.

(Adapted from Ohata, 2004)

Classroom Techniques and Considerations

Young Japanese learners present three interesting challenges. As you well know, this is an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) as opposed to an ESL (English as a Second Language) context where students will not need English in their daily activities outside the classroom- so there is no reinforcement outside the classroom to use English. Second, children are constantly growing up. The content and topics which are appropriate at one grade can become rapidly out of date or childish in a later grade. Therefore, tasks must be designed to provide children with principles that can grow with them, that develop from lesson to lesson. Consequently this leads to the third problem- the difficulty in establishing connectivity between lessons because of scheduling reasons. Especially for ALTs visiting multiple schools, infrequent or intermittent contact (once a month or less) with classes, severely inhibits an ALT's attempts to achieve continuity. While the principles of lesson design will not change, it will not be possible for the ALT to build on knowledge from previous lessons.

Aleda Krause (1997; 2001), an expert on teaching English to Japanese children, has listed ten commonly held notions in Japan as to how children learn languages. Children learn best by:

- (a) "doing the things they like to do,"
- (b) "following a carefully designed syllabus,"
- (c) "hearing a model and repeating,"
- (d) "listening and acting,"
- (e) "playing and doing things in the language,"
- (f) "practicing correct language patterns,"
- (g) "singing and chanting,"
- (h) "starting early,"
- (i) "talking about what's important to them,"
- (j) "trying to say things and making mistakes" (p. 1).

This list is one of a number of notions that should be considered and is by no means exhaustive.

Teaching Techniques that Work

(largely from Cameron, 2001)

The importance of being interesting- content choices

The content of lessons should not stray from things that students find familiar: school (and related topics), play, family, friends, town (Cameron, 2001). When you stray into the unknown, you put a much higher cognitive demand on the students, not only to engage in the language, but on the familiarity with the topic itself. Familiarity with a topic breeds confidence. Confidence is a springboard to communication.

This is not to say that you can't do a lesson on animals in Africa. But the more your subject moves into the specific or obscure details, the more likely you will add to a child's confusion through their inability to relate to the material.

The importance of being interesting- novelty

The novelty of the topics are highly important to students and is reflected in their short attention spans. Topically, you should be searching out objects and content that is relevant to your students. Find out the sports, games and TV shows that your students like. Let the characters be your content. You can control this by designing activities that continually occupy the students' attention for extended periods of time.

The importance of the oral

Language can be basically divided up into 2 categories: written and non-written (oral). For young children, the oral is the aspect through which the language is encountered understood, practiced and immediately learned. It is the prime site of language learning. Language is in-

roduced orally and aurally, and practiced and automatised orally. This is why it is so important that ALTs continually speak in English and encourage the practice of English in their young learners (YLS) and very young learners (VYLS). Meaning and association comes through repetition and repeated use.

Singing songs and chanting: (or if you are less vocally inclined, playing songs on CD and lip syncing) is a great way to inspire native-rhythm and pronunciation in students (Acton, personal communications). Krause (1997) points out that Japanese children are very good at singing and chanting and have an incredible capacity to memorise and internalise information in this manner.

Chanting helps students in many ways. The rhythm and stress patterns are more exaggerated than they would be in conversational English, but this makes it more salient to the YLS and VYLS. Beginners will probably just listen at first, picking up the rhythm of the chant and then join in on the chorus (Celce-Murcia, 2001). Choosing songs with lots of body movement helps too (Acton, personal communications) as it kinesthetically reinforces multiple memory encoding aspects, like in TPR (Total Physical Response) language training.

Rote phrases and collocations: Do not teach students the individual words: THIS- IS- A- (noun) requires students to try to remember 4 pieces of information. Teach it to them as a set phrase. "This is a (noun).", only requires 2 simple pieces of information: the noun/object and the precursory set phrase that introduces it. Have students repeat and vary it as often as possible. Krause (1997) finds this an excellent technique for VYLS and YLS. The collocation is also a correct grammar pattern that they will ideally be repeating in later work.

Likewise ALTs should repeat a target phrase as often as possible in their own lessons, and not stop using it after one lesson. Continue to repeat it in future lessons with the same class so that they are *constantly remembering and building on previous lessons*. This sustained content is vital for their language development.

Oral and Aural combined: hit students with a double whammy, after listening to a word have them say it. After they say it, you make them listen to a story with the word in it.

Keep talking- prolonged dialogues, conversational talk and extended talk

Conversational talk: can take the form of a yes/no dialogue with 2 participants. It can also leave a fair amount of room for open ended questions and responses.

Extended talk: is more along the lines of a short essay answer.

Holding extended dialogues with young beginning students is always a daunting task, especially if you are unfamiliar with what to expect from them. Studies have shown that children between the ages of 5-10 years are unable to determine or cater to the demand of adults in conversation. They simply cannot understand what is demanded of them from the questions in the conversation and cannot shape their responses appropriately. Below the age of 7, they tend to blame themselves for the failure in understanding (not perceiving that the level or type of question asked of them could be inappropriate). Students aren't usually ones to ask questions, so they will rarely take control of a conversation. If you couple this with the tendency for shyness among many youth and the lack of interactiveness in a typical Japanese classroom, then you can foresee the confusion that will ensue. Looking back to Vygotsky and Bruner, scaffolded questions (even simple yes/no questions, accompanied by gestures or realia) that can lead students to extended interactions are extremely helpful.

What are VYLS and YLS capable of? Brown & Yule and McCarthy & Carter (in Cameron, 2001) list 5 basic types of extended talk: narratives, descriptions, instructions, arguments and opinions. Of these 5, narratives and descriptions are the most easily accessible to children.

Narratives: Performing a cohesive extended narrative requires a great deal of grammatical devices. Most children can grasp "so", "when", "then", "because" and "if" after several classes of exposure to English, but they will often be only partially correct. Remember too that these students are still learning these ideas in Japanese, never mind English. What they are capable of grasping easily in narratives includes: past and present tense, dates and time (be

warned, Japanese has no future tense).

Descriptions: Descriptions are another key feature to language mastery. Describing something involves organising its features into categories and listing these features. By building up the components from a description, an ALT can turn a simple picture into a 30 second extended conversation.

(HINT: challenge students to see who can make the longest description of a picture. The student/group with the most sentences at the end can win a small prize like a sticker. Give bonus points for using conjunctions such as “and”.)

Classroom language: English or mixed?

Upon entering the JET Programme, ALTs are asked to create an “English Only” classroom environment. During your time in Japan, you are expected to develop your Japanese skills, to the point where 4th and 5th year ALTs may be expected to have a strong functional command of Japanese- primarily for interacting with staff, not students.

Rely on English as much as possible. Be animated- you need to be with children. Your tone of voice and expression can carry intended/unintended meaning. But do not limit yourself to the oral. Puppets, picture dictionaries, drawings, gestures, miming actions, realia (a pen, a plastic bucket, a ruler- the “real” objects you are talking about) all can become easily accessible tools. If your images are good enough, you should not need any Japanese. If the students are still having trouble, then a one or two word explanation will suffice.

As to the actual English words you use in class- to first time teachers, I offer this advice: *you are not speaking slowly enough, you are not speaking simply enough, you are not exaggerating enough, you are not repeating enough, you are not animated enough, you are not speaking clearly enough.* These are the common faults we all make and these are the faults we slide back to. Recall when you were young and your parents told you bedtime stories. Recall episodes of your favourite types of children’s programs: *Sesame Street, Blues Clues, Polka-Dot-Doors, Bob the Builder*, etc. Remember their sing-song voices. Bring those voices and that enthusiasm to your classes.

Again, repetition is your friend. Simple rote phrases can include:

“Please, can I _____”

“Thank you.”

“I’m sorry, I don’t know/understand.”

“Excuse me, _____”

*HINT A large stuffed animal mascot, to be the second person in your class if you are teaching alone, can be an excellent aide in your language teaching (Scott and Ytreberg, 1990). If you have the time or the funds and the permission of the homeroom teacher, purchasing one for each of your YL/VYL English classes establishes a great interaction partner. Over time it can even become a full character with likes and dislikes. Be careful- avoid using one that is an established Japanese anime character. Children will be more likely to speak to Snoopy in English, than Hello Kitty (whose first language is obviously Japanese).

Multi-sensory lessons and activities

Have them encode new words as many ways as possible. Include picture dictionary-like vocabulary in your lessons. Have the drawings coloured (by hand if necessary). Associate sounds or gestures with them. Have them differentiate them from other words/objects (elephants are bigger than lions). The more connections you have their brains make, the more likely they will remember it.

James Asher’s TPR or Total Physical Response training in language classes is an excellent way to work with young learners. It begins with using concrete commands to teach the new language, eventually weaning them off teacher done models. The order, “touch your head” becomes heard and encoded physically through the action. Be careful when ordering your class of students to “Run to the blackboard.”, taking into account special limitations (Celce-Murcia,

2001). ALTs teaching at the elementary school level must create a selection of activities that use the “listen and do” structure with the constraints of their teaching environment in mind. “Head- shoulders- knees and toes” or “Simon says” games are great examples of TPR in limited spaces. Krause (2001) and William & Suzan Acton (personal communications), all veterans in teaching YLs in Japan, find this a great method to encode English and control classes.

Do not teach grammar unless you have to

Grammar and grammar rules emerge from the space between words and the discourse in children’s language learning. At the elementary level, you will probably never be designing an explicit grammar lesson per se- certainly not a written one.

Size does matter- 30+ student classroom

Remember too, you must divide class time among all your students. Consider a 50 minute lesson. Consider that whatever the activity, you will rarely have more than 1 minute to devote to every student personally. This will/should consciously help you limit the length of interactions and dialogues that you will engage in.

Pair work and small group activities, although inadvisable in some cases, offer students more opportunities to speak and practice language. English classes will typically be conducted in a whole group setting. Certainly the introduction of new material and activities will be done by the ALT and their team teaching partner to the whole group. Quick ways to check for comprehension include: Thumbs Up (teacher asking frequent yes/no questions, children respond with thumbs pointing up for “yes,” thumbs pointing down for “no.”) and quick quizzes (teacher says a list of items that correspond to the concept being taught, randomly adding in a few items that do not. Children clap only for those that fit) (Krause, 2001).

The physical classroom

This section assumes you have some kind of control over your teaching environment- always check with the homeroom teacher (HRT) to see if you can make these changes. Rearranging the classroom, moving desks, having an English corner or even an English wall with posters adds something to the class. It is more than just a novelty factor. It gives them a sense of personalization and vested ownership, and also serves as a constant reminder to the children that English is present, even when the ALT is not with them.

Typical “lecture style” classrooms aren’t the best arrangement for natural communication between pupils. It may also not be the best way to perform a demonstration as many students may not be able to see. Having a demonstration space in the middle is ideal for this (Scott and Ytreberg, 1990). Consider that if you have to rearrange classes each time you go there, you are using up teaching time. However, you are also physically cuing students into the idea that it is “English Time”. This goes back to the idea of routine. The classroom has changed; they too have to change, to speak in English.

Story telling

Many teachers use the powerful technique of story telling in their YL/VYL classes, often supplemented with puppets, pictures and a host of other props. This can easily lead to a host of follow-up games and activities (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

Grouping children

Recall again the points mentioned with age. VYLs may not be used to sharing. They will be quite happy to work alone in the presence of others. Sharing comes gradually and may be something that you will be teaching them. So, past the age of 8, when kids are mature enough to share, consider small group desk arrangements of 6 where students can see each other. It should also be noted that pair work skills must be learned before group work skills. You should not attempt group work with children who cannot handle pair work (Scott and

Ytreberg, 1990).

Pair Work: Again, routine is the key. Establish a routine of partners/pairs with to minimise loss of time. Make sure you go through the routine of what you wish them to do before the group is put in pairs. If there is an odd number of students, make a group of three. You need to be able to circulate around the class- which is something that cannot be done if you've partnered yourself.

Pair work ensures that the entire class is occupied and doing something. No class ever has all groups finish at the same time. There is a temptation to let pair work continue till everyone is finished. In a class of YL/VYs with short attention spans, this is a bad idea. Things can get disruptive very quickly. Give faster groups something to distract themselves with (a picture book from the English corner, an English colouring picture, something quiet) and when about half the class is completed, tell the rest of the class to finish up and move on with your lesson.

Finally, without getting into the complicated issue of bullying (*ijime* in Japanese), understand that there will be students who do not get along together. Try to avoid keeping them together and it is best to seek advice from the HRT or JTE about these students. Try not to single them out in pair assignments and put them in situation where they will be the least disruptive. Thankfully, this is usually not a problem in YL classrooms, typically being a problem only with older students (Scott and Ytreberg, 1990).

Group Work: Many of the benefits of pair work extend to group work. Groups work best if numbers are kept between 3 and 5. The prevailing school of thought is that mixed ability groups (high learners and low learners) are best as they tend to help each other out. But part of dealing with group work in Japanese classrooms involves being aware of students culturally based sensitivities. Students, particularly as they grow older, become trained in their years of schooling that individual achievement is secondary to group/team harmony. Social circles become very important in a child's development. For this reason alone, children should not be choosing their own groups- invariably, someone always gets left out. This is also another reason why some teachers avoid competition games and prize giving in their classes- because there can be a loser. Consult the JTE/HRT for advice on this matter. With years of experience and an innate cultural knowledge- their advice is invaluable as to whether the students are ready for these kinds of activities.

You cannot simply hand a YL group an exercise and expect it to work. If you have to introduce group work to a class, Scott and Ytreberg recommend starting with small "teaching groups"- subgroups you teach separately from the rest of the class; that is, the class receives the general lesson and the subgroup gets a mini lesson. Let the class know that you will be rotating to other groups either through the lesson or in later lessons. This allows you to give more individual attention to these students and makes them feel special, while not necessarily singling any one student out. Later, you will start to introduce more self-reliant groups: those that are given a task to do on their own, only calling on the teacher occasionally for help. This starts with one group, providing them with clear and simple instructions (like, "I want you all to draw one of your favourite foods on this poster. Everyone draws their favourite food and writes its English name."). Go through this process with every group before you let the class have group work. This will be the foundation for later group classes (Scott and Ytreberg, 1990).

So, What Do We Do? *Tips before you plunge in*

DO NOT

1. Overestimate what you believe your class can do. Remember, you are not here to provide them with fluent English communication. They can't even fluently communicate in their own language.
2. Speak rapidly. Typical native speaker speed is too fast even for the most advanced Japanese high school students, let alone beginning elementary students.
3. Overcorrect or use conditionals. Do not use phrases like "Before I do Y, I must do X." because beginning students will invariably do Y then X rather than X then Y.

4. Rely on Japanese to teach your lessons. You are here to provide English language instruction. You are not required to use Japanese in the classroom- leave those explanations (if necessary) to the JTE/HRT. Ideally, if you understand your students' comprehension level, these will be unnecessary to begin with.
5. Teach grammar.
6. Overcorrect. Children love to play with a language, much more than adults. As long as the meaning is correct, the "correctness" of the language is irrelevant. (Celce-Murcia, 2001). A better method to deal with errors is to nod, provide the student with positive reinforcement and repeat the sentence back to them with the correction. Eventually they do pick up on it without having being told that they are wrong in front of the whole class.
7. Use katakana for pronunciation. It becomes a crutch which students will permanently lean on that will distort their pronunciation for years to come. Acton (1984) in his work on accent fossilisation, notes that young learners have the best chance of not developing strong accents in their adult lives if taught early. Better to let them work out the sounds for themselves rather than assume that there is a perfect equivalent sound in Japanese (as often there is none).

DO

1. Speak slowly and clearly. Be clear and simple. Use the happy sing-song voice that you remember from your Sesame Street/childhood learning years. Acton (personal communications) points out that the children will attend more to your mood and tone than your words.
2. Demonstrate while talking to them, gesturing and pointing back to objects as often as possible.
3. Focus on meaning and not correctness.
4. Teach grammar implicitly- through example and repetition. Use authentic communication. Students do not know what a personal pronoun is but do enjoy games of communication (Celce-Murcia, 2001).
5. Be holistic in your approach. You do not have to focus exclusively on one skill as, in life, all four (reading, writing, speaking, listening) are engaged simultaneously (Celce-Murcia, 2001)
6. Give them as many opportunities to speak, listen and apply the language as possible. Your job is to teach students how to use the language, to treat it as a tool. Give it use value.
7. Teach topics the students want to talk about: hobbies, shopping, toys, cartoons. But ensure that the language learning that occurs includes lessons that will grow with the students (Cameron, 2001), so that whereas the topics may change over time, the structures remain applicable.
8. Engage in activities of routine and repetition, as it provides reinforcement for memory encoding (Krause, 1997).
9. Give them self-confidence and encouragement. Apart from the language, it is probably the greatest gift you can give them, because it will last.
10. Give them the chance to break away from standardised responses: a chance to adapt the English, a chance to give them their own voice in the language.
11. Design your lessons to engage students in as many ways as possible: visually, tactilely, orally and aurally. Do not just say the word; draw it out, associate it with a picture, let the children colour the picture in, have them sing it back to you, change the tone from statement to a question. Kelly (personal communications) and many other young ESL learner specialists recommend adopting a multi-sensory approach.

Curriculum & Lesson Planning

Lost in Translation: What are We Trying to Do?

The Ministry of Education Directives on Elementary EFL Education

You will be teaching under a framework of some very general goals, some very specific techniques and some relatively rigid timeframes. A better description comes from MEXT's Foreign Language Activities for Elementary School from their New Course of Study. They advise that

the goal of classes is not merely learning the language, but more importantly, involves cultural education and awareness. MEXT claims that these language activities should aim at “fostering a positive attitude toward communication.” “Activities can utilise a variety of channels for input and output, including listening, repeating, [the] use of picture cards, singing, [and] having children move their bodies” (Kelly, 2004). However, the Ministry guidelines strongly advise against introducing reading and writing to elementary classrooms (Krause, 2001). This leaves ALTs with a good list of activities, but a vague guide as to course or curriculum goals.

Furthermore, ALTs seem to have a timeframe within which to work. The standard Japanese classroom lesson is approximately 50 min in length. Japanese elementary school students receive, on average, about 35 hours of English instruction per year. This figure has increased since the introduction in April 2011 of compulsory “Foreign Language Activities” for fifth and sixth grade elementary school students.

Evidently, EFL has experienced growth in elementary schools even as education policy works to establish clearer guidelines for delivery. The way English is integrated into elementary curriculum is not consistent across the country or even within prefectures or from school to school within a municipality. MEXT has given elementary schools the freedom to build their own curriculum based on the New Course of Study on this matter.

MEXT has been working to create a set of teaching resources and materials that will serve as a consistent set of standards and guidelines for English instruction in elementary schools in the future. The publication and distribution of the manual “Shogakko Gaikokugo Katsudo Kenshu Gaidobukku”, or “Teacher Training Handbook for Foreign Language Activities at Elementary Schools”, and the introduction of *Eigo Noto* in 2011 and *Hi, Friends!* in 2012, textbooks made specifically for foreign language activities at the upper end of elementary school, have sought to address the situation. However, ALTs still have a large portion of the responsibility for designing EFL activities.

From the above, you can see the generalities ALTs have to work within. As Reilly and Ward note in their book *Very Young Learners* (1997), you have the freedom to design the syllabus around the children’s needs- which is best done through topic lead work. What tends to work really well in ALT EFL classes are topics designed to cover/overlap topics students are also learning in their L1 (native language) classes. For instance, if the class is learning about bugs in Japanese, ALTs can design an EFL lesson with bugs as the content. What is important is that ALTs show children that English is not just another topic they are forced to learn in school- but a vehicle through which they can learn about other things.

The Basics: Curriculum Design or Lesson Planning

So, if we take a view that includes the objectives of increasing *cultural education and awareness and allowing students to speak in a naturalistic way* as overall goals of the elementary English activities, then we can design a curriculum and subsequently lessons which aim to satisfy those goals in 50 min classroom segments with large, 30(+) child classes.

The next question involves what we should be designing: a curriculum with lesson plans, or stand alone lessons. The answer comes from your own situation, when you are beginning and who is accepting responsibility for the curriculum. If you are a first-year ALT, you are starting your sessions in the middle of the school year- at the end of the summer semester. You may be asked to follow in the lesson planning/curricular footsteps of your predecessor. As many ALTs have had no teaching experience prior, you can take this as an opportunity to refine your planning and teaching techniques so you are up to speed by the time the next term begins.

ALTs visiting multiple schools can not be curriculum designers because of the infrequency of their lessons and the lack of integration of their lessons into the curricula of the schools they visit. In this case, you can prioritise lesson plans to focus on *cultural education and awareness*. Multiple school visit ALTs will be doing stand-alone lesson planning (lessons without

connection to any prior lessons). Lessons will be slanted more towards cultural education and entertainment. This does not mean you should ignore speaking and oral work, but you must accept that without much support or time for advanced planning at the visiting school, you will probably not be an integral part of their program.

If you are at an elementary school for a longer period of time, HRTs should be contacting you to design lessons which integrate into their curriculum. Being based in an elementary school for weeks or months at a stretch, you have the opportunity to be part of the process. You have an excellent chance to contribute in an ongoing fashion to the children's language development. Under these circumstances, you should attempt to become involved in syllabus design.

Also in many cases team teaching in elementary schools takes place between an ALT and a Japanese homeroom teacher (HRT). Since HRTs have varying levels of English proficiency, this can be a very challenging situation for an ALT. However the same principles apply when designing lessons. You should be prepared for planning to take more time if there is a language barrier that slows communication, but your lessons will be much more successful if you make the effort to get on the same page with the HRT.

Curriculum Design

In its simplest form a curriculum is the sum total of all the courses offered by a school or institution. MEXT has official guidelines for English in elementary schools, and each Board of Education or local school design their own curriculum based on these guidelines and the school needs. Obviously, as ALTs, you will probably not be involved in making the curriculum. But it helps to know the overall vision of what the school is trying to achieve in regards to the education of its students- as these goals will logically have an effect on syllabus design. Currently most schools prioritise increasing the students' comfort level with and exposure to foreign/ English speaking culture, with a secondary goal of improving the oral fluency of the students in English.

Syllabus Design

| Overall Course Goal: to teach 9 year old EFL Japanese students to express (count and write) values up to 1000 | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| | Lesson 1 | Lesson 2 | Lesson 3 | Lesson 4 | Lesson 5 | Goal achieved |
| Objective | Count from 1-24 | Count from 1-99 | Count from 100-1000 | Concept of more than/ less than | Simple subtraction/ addition | Students can count and express values 1-1000. |
| Task/ content | Telling time on a clock | Playing with pocket change | Eating at a fast food restaurant | Game: who has more money? | Paying for groceries | |

The syllabus outlines the main points of a series of classes. We are not only speaking of the content, but also of the overall goals of the course. When asked by a prospective student, "What will this course give me?", designers can reply, "By the end of this course, students will be able to _____ (SWBAT)." It is not only the sum total of all your lesson plans, but the overarching goals that influence the design of your lesson plans.

Consider the following questions:

- What do you wish your students to be able to do by the end of term?
- What will you need to teach them in order to reach those goals?
- Is it a realistic goal in their native language?
- What will they learn next term and what skills must the course provide them?
- How many lessons will you be having with them and how long will it be between lessons?

After you have taken these and other considerations into account, write the overall course goals for your syllabus. Now, consider how each lesson can provide a piece to achieving that goal. Only after that are you ready to start working on individual lessons.

Let us consider a sample situation and possible syllabus:

Daiichi Elementary school will have an ALT coming in 2 times per month for the next 3 months. During each visit, the ALT will see the same 3 classes for 25 minutes. The students are 7-10 years old and have had no training in English, nor have their homeroom teachers. You have been asked to lead the classes and there are no set goals.

Important considerations:

- students have had no prior education in English
- six 25 minute lessons are available per class (very short periods of time)
- there will be 2 weeks between each visit with little continued EFL teaching from the homeroom teachers

With this in mind, you set out 2 simple course goals for your syllabus for the next 3 months.

Identification and oral use of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd person (I, you, he/she/it)
 Identification and use of possessive pronouns relating to simple objects

Your lesson plans may look something like this:

Lesson 1:

objective = introduce personal pronouns
topic = getting to know students in the class
activities = 1. simple song – “I am Bob. Who are you? I am Daisuke. Who are you?”

Lesson 2:

objective = introduce the idea of possession + verb ‘to have’
topic = animals
activities = 1. review the “I am Bob” song
 2. animal card game – “I have a dog. What do you have, Shinji?”
 “I have a cat. What do you have, Megumi?”

Lesson 3:

objective = introduce the idea of possession + 3rd person he/she/it/they
topic = sports
activities = 1. review the “I am Bob” song and animal card game
 2. sports toy game – “I have a ball. What does she have?” (points to girl)
 “She has a bat. What does he have?”

And so on... .

Each lesson builds on previous lessons despite having different topics. The content continues to build towards the ultimate goal of the course. And the repetition, seen in the choice of activities in the lesson, scaffolds to the next lesson, supporting the learner along the way.

Of course I would like to emphasise that it is not the sole responsibility of the ALT to come up with a syllabus but also that of the homeroom teacher and/or the local school/ school board. Multiple school visit ALTs need not consider a syllabus- instead, look at lesson plans as isolated units requested by JTEs/HRTs. If this is what your school wants, or if your visits are few and far between, then it makes sense to make lessons more focused towards intercultural education than communication under a sustained syllabus.

However, if you have a stable and regular routine of elementary visits, you have a great opportunity and should make every effort to plan your syllabus. The changes you see will be dramatic.

Lesson Planning

This is what you execute on a day to day basis. It is a simple piece of paper and all the materials that go with it that outline and organise the course of that day's lesson. Plans will outline the all-important routines you will be using in your class as well as the order that the material is presented in. After a while you should develop a sense of how long activities will take and be able to map that onto the lesson plan as well. Remember, under ideal conditions you will be team teaching. At this point, your JTE/HRT partner will also have to read it to be able to understand and participate in the lesson; and may even be co-developing it with you. A sample plan is provided below. (You may need to keep the English simple/use some Japanese if you are presenting to a HRT).

Title: Lesson 2- Possessives- "I have a dog"

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Overall Course Goal: | |
|-----------------------------|--|

Call this the overall objective/theme/purpose of the lesson/course

Introduce the idea of possession + verb "to have" through the topic of animals

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Product Objectives: | |
|----------------------------|--|

*Consider product objectives as the physical things that students will have done and will be able to do at the end of a lesson. At the end of the day, students **will be able to** (SWBAT) do _____.*

1. SWBAT: state personal possession of an object (animal)
2. SWBAT: pose a simple, direct question to a partner concerning what object (animal) they possess.

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Task Sequence: | |
|-----------------------|--|

Literally, what you are doing from the moment you walk into class till lesson's end. Detailed instructions help you manage time, content and organization. It also gives you a nice framework to evaluate and change your lesson.

1. Greet students, tell them you are happy to see them again (1 min)
 - make a note to remember 1-2 new names in the class
2. Launch into the "I am Bob" song (5 min)
3. Organise class into groups of 4 and hand out animal cards (5 min)
 - letting them colour and keep the pictures gives them a sense of personal investment in the activity
 - make a note to remember 1-2 new names in the class
 - do NOT give out crayons yet, do not want them distracted
4. Show off each animal and repeat the name, get students to repeat with you. (5 min)
 - Move into game where you are asking students what animal they have. Get them to turn around and ask their partners what each of them have (5-8 min)
5. Hand out crayons for colouring in (hint, give them out to each group only after each team has finished two cycles of "I have a dog."- motivating them to do it)
 - try to circulate around the class and speak a few sentences using key words to kids.
6. End class with "the goodbye song."

Of course, the bulk of your lesson time will concern the overall course goal. Designing tasks to meet those goals can be a challenge in and of itself. Below are some sources and texts that provide excellent activities for YLs.

1. **English on a Roll**, by Linda Hopkins Koran. A wonderful textbook and an excellent multi-sensory tool to teach with. <http://www.englishonaroll.com/> Free downloads available for the first 10 lessons
2. **Five-Minute Activities: A Resource Book of Short Activities**, by Penny Ur and Andrew Wright. A good source of start up activities complete with specificity to level and main points being taught.

3. **New Ways in teaching Young Children**, by Linda Schinke-Llano and Rebecca Rauff. A collection of different TESOL activities/lesson plans collected from various sources listing levels, aims, class time and resources required for teaching each lesson.
4. **Young Learners: Web Resources**: operated out of the UK, it has an incredibly large selection of YL links. <http://www.countryschool.com/ylsig/>
5. **Dave's ESL Café**: a familiar name to those in the EFL teaching business, there are a host of lesson plans for you to choose and adapt. <http://www.eslcafe.com/idea/index.cgi?Kids>
6. **Japan Association for Language Teachers' Young Learner SIG** (Special Interest Group). Not only puts you in touch with some of the top researchers in the Japanese EFL field, but also has a moderate sized selection of links to resources. <http://www.tcsig.ialt.org/org/links>

Starting from these books and links, you can easily expand your search criteria to cover a wide area to draw on material for your lesson plans.

ACTFL Scales

The Yardstick: Something to Measure Progression Against

There are numerous scales available by which to judge language proficiency: STEP (Eiken), TOEIC, TOEFL, CBL (Canadian benchmarks) to name a few. Some measure achievement, others proficiency, some both. Some do it poorly, some well. Some are inexpensive and easy to administer, others are expensive and time consuming.

The point being, as a teacher, you should be provided with a measure by which to gauge your students- not only to see where your students **are**, in terms of ability, but in terms of **what is the next logical step** that they must take. It also gives you a common vocabulary when talking to your colleagues about student abilities.

This section introduces the ACTFL Novice categories, since most of your students will be in this range. It is provided here for reference, and you should feel free to adopt another scale if you find it does not meet your needs. For additional levels you may access <http://www.sil.org/lingualinks/languagelearning/OtherResources/ACTFLProficiencyGuidelines/contents.htm>. For more details, see the reference section at the end of the article.

The American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) developed guidelines to describe performance in the four language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The guidelines attempt to segment particular ranges of aptitude into specific sets of skills. They assess what individuals can and cannot do, not what could be achieved through classroom teaching. Each description is a sample and not an exhaustive description of that range. Logically, every higher level assumes the knowledge of the previous levels beneath it.

I have included some of our knowledge about children for your consideration in the ACTFL scales.

ACTFL- Novice

<http://www.sil.org/lingualinks/languagelearning/OtherResources/ACTFLProficiencyGuidelines/contents.htm>

The Novice level is characterised by the ability to communicate minimally with learned material.

Listening- Novice

Novice-Low: Understanding is limited to occasional isolated words, borrowed words, and

high-frequency social conventions. Essentially no ability to comprehend even short utterances. Children will focus on key words that are familiar

Novice-Mid: Able to understand some short, learned utterances, particularly where context strongly supports understanding and speech is clearly audible. Comprehends some words and phrases from simple questions, statements, high-frequency commands and simple formulaic greetings. The listener requires long pauses for assimilation and may require you to repeat the question slower (and may not prompt you to do so).

Novice-High: Able to understand short, learned utterances and some sentence-length utterances, particularly where context strongly supports understanding and speech is clearly audible. Comprehends words and phrases from simple questions, statements, high-frequency commands, and courtesy formulae. May require repetition, rephrasing, and/or a slowed rate of speech for comprehension.

Speaking- Novice

Novice-Low: Oral production consists of isolated words and perhaps a few high-frequency phrases. Essentially no functional communicative ability. Children may be limited to yes/no questions and can answer randomly at times.

Novice-Mid: Oral production continues to consist of isolated words and learned phrases with-in very predictable areas of need, although quantity is increased. Vocabulary is sufficient only for handling simple, elementary needs and expressing basic greetings. Utterances rarely consist of more than two or three words and show frequent long pauses and repetition of the words from the initial sentence. Children may have some difficulty producing even the simplest utterances but may be capable of replacing nouns in formulaic patterned responses.

Novice-High: Able to partially satisfy the requirements of basic communicative exchanges by relying heavily on learned utterances but occasionally expanding these through simple re-combination of their elements. Can ask questions or make statements involving learned material. Most Japanese children will probably not show signs of spontaneity and if they do it falls short of real autonomy of expression. Speech continues to consist of learned utterances rather than of personalised, situationally adapted ones. Vocabulary centres on areas such as basic objects, places, and things they are very familiar with. Pronunciation may still be strongly influenced by Japanese.

Reading- Novice

Novice-Low: Able occasionally to identify isolated words and/or major phrases when strongly supported by context; for example, seeing a picture of a lion and being able to form the letters.

Novice-Mid: Able to recognise the symbols of an alphabetic and/or syllabic writing system and/or a limited number of characters in a system that uses characters. The reader can identify an increasing number of highly contextualised words and/or phrases including cognates and borrowed words, where appropriate. Material understood rarely exceeds a single phrase at a time, and rereading may be required.

Novice-High: Has sufficient control of the writing system to interpret written language in areas of practical need. Where vocabulary has been learned, children can read for instructional and directional purposes, standardised messages, phrases, or expressions, such as some items on menus, schedules, timetables, maps, and signs. At times, but not on a consistent basis, the Novice-High level reader may be able to derive meaning from material at a slightly higher level where context and/or extralinguistic background knowledge are supportive.

Writing- Novice

Novice-Low: Able to form some letters in the alphabet.

Novice-Mid: Able to copy or transcribe familiar words or phrases and reproduce some from memory. No practical communicative writing skills.

Novice-High: Able to write simple, fixed expressions and limited memorised material and some recombination thereof. Can supply information on simple forms and documents. Can write names, numbers, dates, and other simple autobiographical information, as well as some short phrases and simple lists. Can write all the letters in the alphabet and a few simple familiar words. Spelling and representation of symbols (letters, syllables, characters) may be partially correct.

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