

TIME TO STRUCTURALLY DEVELOP TEAM-TEACHING

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Abstract

For many, 1987 marked the blossoming of team-teaching in the Japanese foreign language classroom. This marked the year that 848 people from four countries came to Japan on the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Programme. Team-teaching appears to have gone through glasnost and perestroika phases, but it would appear that the process has changed little over the past decade. Teachers still have a tendency to work ALTs (Assistant Language Teachers) into their lessons rather than develop the English programme in their school given the presence of a resource person.

This paper proposes a system for tapping ALT creativity and strengths, and for retaining this valuable (and expensive) input. Teachers need to devise some system for building upon their syllabi utilizing the skills the ALT brings. This color coded index card system could help enable ALTs to handle more responsibility and authority, could help index ideas for certain text units based on a number of variables important to the instructor, and could serve as an activity pool for the entire teaching staff, at a particular school.

“The youth gets together this material to build a bridge to the moon, or per chance, a palace or temple on earth, and at length the middle-aged man concludes to build a woodshed with them.”-HENRY DAVID THOREAU

“The chains of habit are too weak to be felt until they are too strong to be broken.”
-SAMUEL JOHNSON

INTRODUCTION

In the keynote lecture signaling the 10 year anniversary of the JET Programme (Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme), the speaker heralded, “great progress made in the internationalization of Japan and in the foreign language classrooms”. Most of the participants and speakers at this congratulatory affair went on to confirm that JET had been an inexorable success,

that the growth of the program demonstrated irrefutable excellence and wholehearted satisfaction by those involved.

JET began in 1987 with 848 participants representing four countries (the United States, Great Britain, Australia, and Canada). By 1997, it had grown immensely, with a participant pool of 5,030 from eighteen countries and alumni ranks numbering over 12,000. In terms of one of its two touted goals, the deepening of (or promoting of) internationalization/the betterment of foreign language education, achievements are usually identified within the parameters of the former. It is quite often pointed out by speakers at conferences and orientations that Japanese people have become more international as a result of JET. If this appears to downplay achievements in the area of education (curiously, upward of 90% of the participants have worked in schools), then the promotional literature of the quasi-governmental body overseeing JET (referred to as CLAIR, or Conference of Local Authorities for International Relations) states the purpose more lucidly: *“JET...aims to promote internationalization at the local level by inviting young overseas graduates to assist in international exchange and foreign language education in local governments, boards of education and junior and senior high schools throughout Japan. It seeks to foster ties between Japanese citizens (mainly youth) and JET participants at the person to person level.”*

Others waxed more analytical about JET's impact. Former First Secretary to the Cultural Attache of the American Embassy, Charles Walsh, for example, liked to compare JET to the Peace Corps: *“Admittedly, the participants get more out of being here than the intended recipients of their skills get out of them.”* Author Sugiyama Yasushi asserted that, *“such programmes (as JET) should be expanded so that at least one foreign teaching assistant is assigned to each secondary school in Japan, to teach not only English but other foreign languages and subjects, even including Japanese culture and history courses. Improved foreign language education, with expanded programmes for employing foreign teachers in Japanese schools, should contribute significantly towards the internationalization of the Japanese people.”* (Hook and Weiner, 1992). Sugiyama points to an extended role for the assistant teachers in the educational sphere, assuming that their presence would result in instant success with respect to JET's second (and now often unmentioned) goal: The improvement of foreign language education at the lower and upper secondary levels.

EARLY FEEDBACK ON TEAM-TEACHING

Team-teaching was to be the main duty for those participants coming to Japan on JET as well as for thousands of others who secured positions independent of the government-sponsored program. According to a 1989 analysis in an international publication, JET was, *“window dressing to ease foreign pressure on trade and other issues related to Japan's openness to the outside world.”* (Itoi, 1988). The article went on to point out: *“Almost 30% of the 15 year old students surveyed in one prefecture said that conversation lessons offered in the JET program were useless in their preparations for high school entrance exams.”* (It is left up to the reader, presumably, to note that 70% must have expressed satisfaction with the lessons. Given that 96% of the lower secondary school graduates go on to senior high school, this could be interpreted as a positive figure).

A year later, another major publication pointed to an increasingly vociferous criticism made by participants on JET: *“The primary purpose of the ALT in the classroom is to assist the main teacher, and often this involves being used as a tape recorder. Many feel that they are not contributing anything to the students’ learning.”* (Baffa, 1990). Said one teacher: *“Some Japanese teachers resent that AETs make so much money (¥300,000 per month in 1989; note that the salary is unchanged as of 1997, and is now referred to as a “stipend”) because Japanese teachers have many responsibilities outside the classroom. But we don’t talk about it in public places.”* (Rich, 1989). A 1988 piece pointed out that, *“imposing inexperienced and ‘aggressive’ youths on Japanese teachers exacerbates already exhausting schedules and stressful teaching conditions.”* (Roberts, 1988). *“ALTs want to have tangible results after just one year in Japan. They want radical changes, but they must realize that, especially in Japan, change comes slowly,”* advised former Ministry of Education Curriculum Specialist Minoru Wada (Roberts, 1988).

TEACHER VIEWS TODAY

From a questionnaire administered to Japanese teachers at secondary schools (Juppe, 1997), the following comments were common (appeared in the comments of at least one-third of the respondents): *“Every school should have an ALT, and he or she should work by the same conditions as the JTL.”* *“ALTs should be trained in language teaching.”* *“Motivated ALTs should be hired.”* *“Make a good book with team-teaching ideas from all over Japan.”* Most of the comments indicate that teachers seem to lack control over the process. Interestingly, the final comment indicates many teachers’ desire to have team-teaching standardized, homogenized, set forth in a set of directives rather than be left open to initiative. It also reflects a sense of stagnation, that team-teaching has fallen into a pattern which changes only upon substitution of the partner, the ALT. Many offered this glum, deconstructionalist conclusion: *“If we get a good ALT, the team-teaching goes well. If we get a bad person, it doesn’t go well.”*

The chains of habit may indeed appear unbreakable from the teachers’ point of view. ALT sentiment from a 1996 national questionnaire (all JET Programme ALTs) reflects this mood and apathy: *“Two of my JTEs were completely unwilling/unable to communicate with me at even a very basic level in English. This has made planning lessons and communication in the classroom very difficult.”* *“The Japanese teachers should be required to attend a workshop or seminar on how to work with AETs. They need to be told of the expectations and working styles of the AET. Many JTEs do not know how to deal with an ALT.”* *“As I have noted in this questionnaire, I feel under-utilized. I have TESL qualifications, but my work seems of little benefit to the students.”* *“So much time and money has (sic) been spent on educating me, but here’s the problem: only 1/2 the term is getting this info and that 1/2 to be honest is the least likely to be able to make the changes or set the Mombusho intended direction.”* Hence, a general sense that ALTs- many of whom are fresh out of university and might be in their maiden work posts- cannot contribute to the teaching process or are incapable of figuring out how to apply their skills and talents.

TEAM-TEACHING DEFINED

Perhaps the most standard definition of team-teaching is as follows (curiously, the 115 page *Handbook for Team-Teaching*, a Monbusho publication, avoids defining team-teaching in any succinct fashion): “A concerted endeavor made jointly by an ALT and JTL in an English language classroom in which the students, JTL, and ALT are engaged in communicative activities.” (Monbusho, 1993). A glass viewed as half-full can also be seen as half-empty; in this instance, one might interpret the definition as “vague” while another might find it “open to interpretation”. Many Japanese teachers complain that it does not give enough direction, does not provide enough guidance for the pair to proceed smoothly. Many ALTs insist that the definition sets them on equal ground with their Japanese counterparts, while Japanese teachers assert that the “A” in ALT (assistant) brands the foreign teacher subordinate to the JTL. (Some ALTs have insisted that the “A” has doomed them to a sentence of virtual peonage under the occasionally dictatorial JTL. One cited frequent orders by a teacher for the ALT to, “get him a cup of green tea while he worked”.) ALTs, furthermore, tend to interpret “communicative activities” to mean “speaking and listening” (aural/oral communication activities) while some Japanese teachers seem to read it to mean “integrated skills approach”, meaning that even translation or text analysis in Japanese could be defined as a communicative activity.

HISTORICAL LOOK BACK

Essentially, team-teaching appears to have followed three approaches: 1. Internationalization-oriented. 2. Traditional. 3. Objective-focused. These three are not chronologically separate phases; objective-focused team-teaching could very well have occurred in 1987 while internationalization-oriented teaching might be opted for even today. A majority of teachers, however, agree that internationalization-oriented teaching took place largely during the early periods when ALTs were sent to a number of schools rather than based at one institution. Likewise, under the traditional approach, many teachers agree that a patterned style of team-teaching became popular, and was adopted thereafter by many as a “safe” way to work with a foreign counterpart.

Under internationalization-oriented teaching, the following type of lesson was likely: An ALT came for a short period of time (for one-shot guests, this was likely a day’s, or, more realistically put, several hours’, visit). The Japanese teacher worked largely as a translator, interpreter, master of ceremonies, while the ALT introduced him or herself, fielded questions, played a game/did a magic trick/played a musical instrument/all of the aforementioned, and bade the class farewell, perhaps forever. The primary objective was exposure to a non-Japanese person, contact with an “alien” (alien to mean non-national here, but implying otherwise... to quote Steve Bruce in 1989, “.....Sometimes when I pull into a rural school parking lot and see the faces incredulously registering my arrival, I feel as though I might as well be in a spaceship landing from outer space.” (Bruce, 1988). Said Bruce Blum of the experience: “Depending on the circumstances, (and your own

attitude) the one-shot visit can be a day of joy, friendship and cultural sharing, or it can become yet another exhausting installment in a long, monotonous schedule.” (Blum, 1986). Essentially, the day was judged on the quality of the contact and the mood/attitude of the ALT.

With the traditional approach, the following pattern became strangely common: New words were introduced, they were read and repeated (by the ALT), text was then read and repeated by the ALT, and some sort of reading-based drill/quiz was taken up. Even as late as 1993, ALT Peter Crayson, in a semi-annual report, indicated that 60% of all lesson plans were developed entirely by the JTLs for the area ALTs, without any input whatsoever coming from the ALTs. Furthermore, these lesson plans followed a suspiciously similar pattern: The one outlined above. Stephen Brisati, in an independently prepared report, indicated in 1992 that the root of the problem with stagnation lay with Japanese teachers' closed minds toward anything new (i.e., teaching English) while this was compounded by an overall ALT lack of TEFL knowledge and classroom experience. In Hokkaido, for a regional conference, a list of complaints about team-teaching read as most do: *“Choral reading and new word repetition are excessive.”* In a list of the most frequently experienced complaints with team-teaching collected in Okayama in 1993 (Juppe, 1993), “excessive reading” was identified as the number one complaint among 53 workshop participants.

Objective-focused team-teaching appears to be the ideal that the Ministry of Education has encouraged over the years. In a 1994 lecture on effective team-teaching, Senior Curriculum Specialist Masao Niisato indicated that both instructors should function during the planning stage as resource people/organizers/motivators. In fact, the majority of the advice given was directed at both instructors, leaving the teachers to divide responsibility as seen necessary. In the ministry guidelines that I delivered to all JET teacher trainers, I indicated that team-teaching objectives were to be devised based on a number of variables, and that no two schools could expect to pursue the same set of aims. This amoebic process would necessitate the guidance/leadership of the Japanese teacher, but under no circumstances was the team-teaching process to remain the exclusive responsibility of the Japanese partner.

A fourth “type” of team-teaching could be defined vaguely as “other” with occasionally used approaches such as “separate but complementary”, lumped in. This approach has been followed largely by teachers of other foreign languages (i.e., languages other than English). As Ministry approved texts are not used in the teaching of French, for example, it is common that the JTL and the French ALT will split the class into two groups of 20 and exercise different skills (planned cooperatively sometimes, other times not). It should be pointed out that another reason for this division is lack of communicative ability on the part of the Japanese instructor: Often, the Japanese teachers assigned French/German classes are teachers of other subjects who take these other languages on as an additional task. Therefore, their communicative competence in the particular tongue may not be strong enough to conduct joint teaching or to plan a lesson; explaining grammar and functional points in the native tongue might be a preferred or necessary role.

It is not to say that this approach is dysfunctional, or inappropriate. In fact, I often suggested that progressive teachers experiment with such alternatives, particularly in a case whereby the ALT seemed capable of handling a class alone. If the Japanese teacher were to maintain

responsibility for the assessment of student performance, then there was no problem with such a method. Opponents are quick to point out that such conduct is illegal, that Japanese teachers must be in the classroom with an ALT by law, that because ALTs are unlicensed instructors, they are unable to teach alone; this is erroneous. Actually, dentists/firefighters and other special “guest lecturers” are permitted to “teach” without licenses. As long as ALTs are not ultimately responsible for grades, then it is permissible to divide classes, yet work toward a common end cooperatively.

Despite the approach taken, it should be pointed out that one common, chronic complaint appears endemic to team-teaching: The entrance examination. An analytical theorist would dismiss the two as incompatible, as would a structural theorist. Likewise, on all sides, there is general consensus that a synthesis of examination-oriented English and team-teaching (assuming it to be of a communicative nature) are incongruent aims. *“It is a waste of time to visit academic schools until the entrance examination is changed from archaic grammar to practical, functional English. My base school is an academic school and has no desire to host me, or any other JET, as, in their opinion, it contributes in no way to the exam results.”* This came from an ALT last year. It was also the most common question asked of me at conferences during my four year stint as ALT Advisor. *“ALTs had better be placed in junior high schools. At our school, we have to concentrate on English for the entrance examinations,”* confessed one senior high teacher. In 1993, in a pilot school report on team-teaching from Fukushima (these projects are two year studies on team-teaching carried out in each prefecture at a designated “pilot” school), second grade students complained that while their communicative skills seemed to be progressing, they worried that, “they were falling behind”, that team-teaching would not prepare them for the exams that awaited them a year later.

Even the Japan Forum recognized the perceived discrepancy in their February 1997 newsletter. *“Many high schools have set up new courses in oral communication (NOTE: Should read aural/oral communication) and approximately 8,000 (NOTE: incorrect figure; 4574 would have been accurate) native-speaking teaching assistants are made available each year in high schools (NOTE: also junior high schools, boards of education, prefectural boards of education, city offices, etc.) around the country under the JET Program. However, because the entrance examinations to universities continue to emphasize reading and writing skills, actual study of English does not necessarily stress oral communication. The pressures of entrance-exam study also make it difficult to foster understanding of other languages, cultures, and people and the ability to adjust to and appreciate such differences.”* (February, 1997). Clearly, it is a barrier to students in Fukushima, to teachers who work with ALTs, and to policy analysts who find such innovative (or aggressive) pursuits as team-teaching counterproductive to what remains irrefutably important: The entrance examinations represent a critical step/stage in the successful academic careers of young people.

THE ALT

The ALTs’ roles could be broken down into perhaps three (and further sub-divided in two).

Over the years, ALT duties/undertakings seemed to fit into the following set of classifications:

1. Ambassadorial (a. motivator b. informant)
2. Academician (a. instructor b. educator)
3. Communicator (a. facilitator b. modeller)

As an “ambassador” figure, the ALT serves to motivate students in the learning of language as well as to stimulate curiosity about things foreign. The ALT is likely to engage the students in discussion about his/her personal life, as well as offer views on issues and problems. In both ways, the ALT serves as an informant, or window to the world.

As an academician, the ALT may actually teach aspects of the language (grammar, for example). Through drills and practice, the ALT may work as an instructor, helping students to master certain applications in a foreign language.

Finally, as a communicator, the ALT’s presence- it is hoped- will serve as an immediate impetus for student use of the target language. Many JTLs complain that ALT effectiveness in this area has diminished, as was evident at a recent high school ESS sponsored party at which, *“the eight foreigners, mostly ALTs, all spoke good Japanese. They were unproductive guests,”* said their club advisor, placing an odd utilitarian purpose on their presence at a social function. (Not to mention the quote of a high-ranking administrator in 1989: *“When the ALTs master Japanese, they should be sent home.”* So much for exchange.) As a modeller, the ALT will serve as an example to follow with such aspects of language mastery as pronunciation.

As the ALTs work under a variety of conditions, job descriptions vary widely. Hours in the classroom differ; the number of schools to which one is dispatched varies. The ALT may be 22, the ALT may be 35; this might be the first job the ALT has held, it might represent a career change. The Japanese teachers may be working with an Australian one year, an American with a southern drawl the next.

THE JTL

In the early stages, some Japanese teachers seemed almost to fear team-teaching. As large numbers of foreign assistants poured into the country, some seemed to sense that they were to bear the burden of accommodating these newcomers (actually, they were probably correct to assume so; in many cases, offices and politicians arranged for ALTs to come while the teachers’ schedules were weighted down with duties resulting from the arrival of the foreigner at the school. In one such stand-off between a board of education and a teachers’ union in Hokkaido, an ALT taught no lessons from September to March). Other teachers seem to feel insecure; they had a sense that their authority was being undermined.

Were the Japanese teachers being “replaced”, or was their authority being undermined? A curriculum specialist at the Ministry of Education repeatedly asserted that JET was “temporary”; it was intended to jump-kick foreign language education by making it more communicative. A ceiling of 3000 was informally placed on the program during the late 1980s, which was shattered early (note that the program continues to grow even today, as it veers toward 6000. Much like the

drifting vessel *Voyager*, few officials seem to be able to predict where JET is headed number-wise).

Early in the 1990s, linguist Peter Medgyes discussed the changeover in the East Bloc regarding language education. With an increasingly high demand for English teachers, a debate raged in the former Soviet satellites: Should a great number of foreign (i.e., native speakers of English) teachers be brought in, or should more native teachers be trained? In favor of the native teachers, Medgyes speculated seven advantages, many of which would appear to be strengths for native teachers in the team-teaching process as well:

1. *Empathy*. As the teacher was a learner of English at one time, Medgyes speculates that a bond exists between the learner and a native who has demonstrated a certain degree of proficiency in the target language. In fact, the teachers are still learners.
2. *Model Learner*. In terms of long term motivation, a native teacher may be more effective than a native speaker. A native speaker may spur conversation by being unable to communicate in the host language, but the teacher is able to pull students along with a joint emphasis on both accuracy and fluency. Certainly in Japan there is admiration for one who has mastered a task to perfection.
3. *Ability to Foresee Difficulties*. At all levels of study (for example, with second year students and upcoming entrance examinations), native teachers know where difficulties arise and how to overcome hurdles.
4. *Knowledge of Native Tongue*. While immersion can be excellent, grammatical explanation is sometimes essential, particularly with a Category 4 language difficulty relationship such as exists between Japanese-English (note that to achieve the same degree of proficiency in French as in Japanese, the native English speaker needs 480 hours of classroom French study versus 1320 for Japanese).
5. *Knowledge of the Students*. Surely with a culture as “isolationist”, “unique” (I find both terms inappropriate) as Japan, a thorough knowledge of children’s lives and lifestyles would be important in classroom instruction. Again, the native has a lifetime of experience behind him or her, plus comparative knowledge of the family structure, sociological patterns, etc.
6. *Learner Strategy Familiarity*. Teachers know what works with Japanese students. TEFL/TESL graduates often run into trouble with “reticent” Japanese students, or students who they perceive to be cheating on pair work activity, for example. Here the students may be issued worksheets for an information gap pair activity, and they may spend the entire time discussing in Japanese or simply swapping papers. From the Japanese students’ viewpoint, this may be acceptable behavior, as the Westerner’s instructions may not have been very thorough. The Westerner may feel that because they are using an information gap exercise in which two students have different sets of data, and because they are in a foreign language lesson, an explanation may be unnecessary. Logic, the teacher might feel, is sufficient for carrying out the language practice activity. Students may not be able to adjust to this different classroom practice. Again, the Westerner may be correct here, however; motivation to learn aural/oral English may be low.
7. *Knowledge of the Language*. While native speakers may know their language in the sense of

being able to use it to virtual perfection, native teachers usually have a very thorough grounding in the grammar and syntax of the language they are teaching. This knowledge is of course indispensable in Japan, particularly given the emphasis on the entrance examinations.

Could a foreign teacher perform as well as a Japanese instructor? Certainly, depending upon the teachers being compared. However, most assistants are not well versed enough in the above to handle full-time posts and are better suited for their intended purpose: As assistants. As assistants, there is dual responsibility for both teachers: The JTL must assess the school language program and determine how the ALT could best fit into the language courses, while the ALT should analyze the conditions/situation at the school and attempt to recommend areas to which his/her talents could be applied given the status of the language course.

Still, in an interview with an associate professor (a former JET participant), he pointed out that: *“English in Japan will never improve significantly until one basic fact is confronted, one that is neither a secret nor mystifying: Most teachers in the field cannot speak English adequately. Wait, enough bureaucratic rubbish... they do not use the English they possess to teach the target language. Why? One, it’s too much work. Two, spoken English is not called for in the curriculum. Three, for social/cultural reasons, teachers and students don’t want to do this.”*

Just three years ago, in an article entitled, *Jury Still Out on Team-Teaching*, Sakae Onoda outlined the following weaknesses in team-teaching:

1. The process requires compromise and consensus, which are often not reached.
2. It is unsuitable for those who are introverted, as it focuses on oral communication.
3. It is not as efficient or flexible as ordinary lessons, as extensive planning is often required.
4. Systematic team-teaching rarely occurs as it is not part of the curriculum.

Onoda goes on to emphasize five benefits for which team-teaching must strive:

1. It facilitates realistic and effective dialogue presentation.
2. The teachers compensate for each other.
3. Ideas are generated through discussion, thereby improving the JTE’s oral skills.
4. Answers are evaluated from two viewpoints.
5. A cross-cultural dimension is added to the lessons.
6. There is an expansion of teaching techniques.

Onoda’s list implies that ALTs be worked into or fit into a language program, that duties be found for the ALT, or that the ALT take up the same duties as the JTL. There is little vision for an expanded role of both, for an expanded course syllabus in which students take advantage of the strengths of both instructors.

OBJECTIVE FOCUSED TEAM-TEACHING

Obviously, despite following precisely the same Course of Study for Foreign Language Education, no two schools are identical in their pursuit of English. First, a deconstructionalist definition of team-teaching should be established to pave the way for proper course formulation:

“Team-teaching is the best way for two instructors to get through a lesson given a set of variables.” (Juppe, 1994). Granted, this definition says little, but it gives teachers the freedom to structure a language program based on their perceptions of what is needed. Who knows this best? A bureaucrat behind a desk in Tokyo or a teacher toiling within the staff room of a school?

GENERAL AIMS OF TEAM-TEACHING

Initially, the Japanese staff should be responsible for establishing the aims of the language program. The following six factors should be considered in establishing the need for an ALT and a role which he or she can develop:

1. *ALT Purpose.* Of the six roles outlined earlier, which will best suit the students, and which will best suit the ALT?
2. *School Curriculum.* How important is foreign language to the students? Are they headed for jobs following graduation, or might they go on to study at university?
3. *Student Purpose.* Are they learning to decipher difficult text, to achieve a certain proficiency with academic vocabulary, or are they looking to utilize aural/oral skills?
4. *Job Type.* How often will the ALT be at the school? Is it possible to visit all of the lessons on an equal basis, or is more advantageous to confine the ALT's work to one grade level?
5. *ALT Strengths.* Most important, the Japanese staff has to be able to determine the supplementary strengths an ALT brings. Does he/she appear to be a grammarian, or is he/she a bubbly, talkative type? Can he/she function in Japanese? Has he/she got an aptitude/training for teaching foreign language? How much supervision will this newcomer require?
6. *Student Proficiency Level.* How can the student ability level be matched with the ALT strengths /abilities?

Again, each school/staff should give these factors great consideration before the ALT begins working.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The following considerations need to be thought over jointly, with the JTL maintaining authority over the process.

1. *Syllabus Used.* In other words, what text is being used? Toward the achievement of what objectives as delineated in the Course of Study? On several occasions, I discovered that ALTs who had been teaching aural/oral communication courses were unaware of which course they were actually teaching. In other words, he or she came to discuss a problem in teaching aural/oral communication, and when I asked them which class specifically they were teaching, they would stop, and reply, “Uh, I don't know. It's just English.” Such a lack of fundamental knowledge led me to believe that little actual planning had been done for the course, that the Japanese teacher was simply fitting the ALT into a time schedule rather than working him or

her into the syllabus.

2. *Macro Skills*. Are the students to exercise their productive skills (i.e., writing/speaking) or are receptive skills more desirable (i.e., listening/reading)?
3. *Specific Language Skills to be Acquired*. Are the students to learn note-taking? Listening for gist? Intensive listening? Pronunciation?
4. *Grammar/Vocabulary*. Aside from what the text presents, are there other patterns/situations that the instructors deem useful for students?
5. *Use of Communicative Methodology*. Is this to be employed in just one lesson per week, or to be employed in split class fashion (i.e., section A is grammar, section B is aural/oral)?
6. *Lesson Stage Considerations*. In the final analysis, where should the various activities be practiced (the review, practice, manipulation, introduction, consolidation stages)?

In all fairness, however, one former ALT (Chiba, 1989–1991) shook his head when presented with this suggestion. *“I was never around any school long enough to know what was going on. I couldn’t really have contributed because of my own ignorance. There were too many schools to monitor.”*

INDEX CARD SYSTEM

Under present conditions, particularly at junior high school, teachers shift from school to school (i.e., they are transferred). Hence, within the span of several years, the staff may change markedly. Also, ALTs come and go (note that under JET, participants are limited to three years). Some bring with them excellent ideas for teaching, some employ unique approaches to classroom instruction. All too often, this input is lost; as one of the teachers lamented, *“Monbusho should make a book of good ideas!”* Again, an idealistic, but undesirable wish. Firstly, the Ministry would not have the manpower to create such a colossal undertaking. Secondly, it is unlikely that a budget could be secured at the national level for such a project. Thirdly, when one considers that *Handbook For Team-Teaching* took several years to complete, the publishing of a voluminous work is an apocryphal prospect. Fourthly, given the refinement process and the fact that texts are already edited/censored at the Ministry, the stuffing is likely to get beaten out of any manuscript that finds its way into the labyrinthian passages of Kasumigaseki. Rather, the best place to create such a project would be at a school, locally. The catalogue of supplementary ideas could be structured in any fashion, but in this age of high-tech fads and enormous expenditures that might leave a cash-strapped staff hemming and hawing, the following approach could be easily and uniformly adopted to create a supplementary resource system. Firstly, a system should be created using index cards. These are of a uniform size. They are convenient because they can be reproduced easily and exchanged/copied, and they do not require compatible software systems. The cards should be as follows:

1. Skills-Development Oriented. The cards would be categorized in the following manner:
 - a. Macro Skills (listening, reading, speaking, writing; these would be represented by the color on the face of the card)

- 1) Listening- Red
 - 2) Speaking- Blue
 - 3) Reading- Black (finicky scholars may argue that black is not actually a color: okay, then change it to purple)
 - 4) Writing- Green
- b. Stage Focus (the number on the face of the card)
- 1) Review
 - 2) Introduction/instruction
 - 3) Practice/manipulation
 - 4) Consolidation
- c. Activity Focus (the letter on the face of the card)
- 1) A. (Content focus)
 - 2) B. (Grammar focus)
 - 3) C. (Culture focus)
 - 4) D. (Micro skills focus)

It would be easiest to explain the system by presenting an example or two.

(Note that these cards would have to be bilingual; otherwise, some Japanese teachers would regard them as burdensome.)

(Blue) B-3/4

(blue)

Activity: Game

Grammar/Content: Subjunctive

APPROACH: Get students to practice subjunctive sentences repeatedly.

PROCEDURE: Divide class into six teams. One representative from each team comes to the front.

He/she looks at his or her row with back to the chalkboard.

The teachers then put up two parts of a sentence on the board. The row acts out both parts until the student can correctly guess the

(back side of the card)

sentence (done in two parts).

EXAMPLE: If I were sick..... (1)

I would go to the hospital. (2)

Without speaking, all students act out these sentences.

The first student to make a correct sentence wins a point.

ROLES: ALT and JTL demonstrate using the example.

Then, each teacher covers three rows to ensure good usage.

FOLLOW-UP: Students write the sentences from memory.

The ALT checks them.

REF.: Materials box, number 15 (sentences)

The “B” refers to a grammar-focused activity. The 3/4 mean that the idea could be used at either a practice stage or consolidation stage. The color blue indicates that the macro skill is to be speaking.

The REF section refers to a set of organized boxes in which materials and worksheets have been stored. With such easy reference, teachers could conceivably locate this card just minutes prior to the lesson, secure the materials which have been catalogued, and add a dynamic activity focusing on aural/oral proficiency to an otherwise reading-laden lesson.

The following activity card would be suitable for either the lower or the secondary level, and focuses on pattern practice, which is (often criticized as uninteresting). Refer to the card below:

(Green) A-4 (Green)

Activity: Pattern practice, vocabulary building

Grammar/Content: There is/There are/Locative prepositions

APPROACH: Students participate in a scavenger hunt in which they search for items used in offices.

PROCEDURE: The teachers hide 10 small pictures all over the room. In pairs, students search for pics. If they find one, they have to write a sentence down. The first pair to find all are the winners. After, the sentences are checked (students read).

(back side of card)

ROLES: JTL and ALT demonstrate how to search.

The ALT writes a sentence on the board while the JTL explains the correct form. The teachers then walk about and encourage the students.

FOLLOW-UP: The ALT later checks for accuracy.

REF.: Small pictures/worksheet, material box, file 22.

This is an “A” activity, though it could be filed as a “B” activity (the emphasis for high school students would be on these items: stapler, hole punch, paper clip, correction fluid, etc. At the junior high school level, the items could be changed to animals, giving the activity more of a grammar focus).

In both activities, the ALT is responsible for grading the paperwork, the class work. For the JTL, who might have a homeroom, a club, umpteen meeting to attend, a cleaning station, and a partridge in a pear tree, checking each individual paper (for, say, six to eight classes) might prove

impossible. The ALT, however, with an average of 15 lesson hours per week, may have several free periods during the day in which to tackle grading with a stronger emphasis on accuracy and with stronger consideration given to comments.

This demonstrates several ways in which the ALT might help bolster an English program. Moreover, the system would be built upon year by year, and would diversify as different ALTs and teachers contributed ideas/plans/materials to the data bank. Regardless of the text, many of the ideas could always be applied or adjusted, and the development of such a system would reduce the amount of time teachers would need to spend creating materials/activities. Furthermore, a new ALT could read through the cards and develop a keener sense of what activities work in what situation. This would greatly assist the Japanese teachers in terms of orientation.

There are others that might be taken into consideration (of course, this would differ based on the variables at the school).

1. *Grading Written Work.* The JTL should establish the standards, or at least, approve of them. In this way, the ALT could work autonomously to help the JTL with a time-consuming task.
2. *Creation of Cards.* The ALT could be given a term syllabus and asked to generate ideas in advance. At each weekly teachers' meeting, the ALT could present on what potential ideas have been created. The teachers could then offer guidance/opinions on what would work.
3. *Oral/aural Testing Components.* Should pair work be used on a frequent basis, then it should be tested. The JTL and ALT could decide what factors are important, what needs to be tested, and then the ALT could test the students for a portion of their grade. If pair work/aural-oral work is a component of an examination, students are far more likely to recognize that performing successfully is a critical part of their subject grade.
4. *Action Research.* With a native speaker based in a school, the teachers should consider conducting informal research into what works well. For example, the teachers may decide to give aural transcription homework once a week (students listen to a dialogue recorded by the ALT; they then complete the missing sections and conduct additional practice work to ensure vocabulary/term mastery). They could take the data for control classes and examination differences in student listening comprehension.

Such research could then be presented at seminars/workshops, or submitted to teaching journals (either in Japanese or English, as the "term" could cover either).

5. *Aural Access Center.* The ALT could organize and develop a self-access center for use by students on their own (for improving their listening ability). Such a center could be open from 3:00-5:00, staffed by the ALT, who would monitor student work if desired. Furthermore, this would make the ALT more "accessible" to students by basing him or her in one location. It would also give the ALT authority for an ongoing, important project.
6. *After School Reading.* Slow learners are often pulled along like large sea creatures in a drag-net fishing operation. The ALT could be assigned one or two afternoons during which slower learners could come practice reading with the ALT and receive some sort of recognition for the practice: A star, a seal for example. Once again, the ALT would try to help these students develop their skills in English while assuming responsibility for a critical project.

It is unlikely that any Japanese teacher would have the time to carry out any of the aforementioned projects. The ALT could, as subordinate to the Japanese teacher, *but as a staff member of the school* contribute much to the language program by being given responsibility for some of the syllabus. The Japanese staff would still direct activities, but would delegate much of the work to ALTs whose largest complaint in any survey, by far, appears to be discontent with under-utilization.

Initially, creating such a program would require a great deal of planning and work. Once in place, however, it would likely become self-generating, and each ALT could become acquainted with the base tasks during an arrival orientation. The program could be altered/built upon thereafter based on the particular strengths that individual brings to the school.

No high-tech twist has yet been considered, but at present, with some support from an administrative office (perhaps a joint operation carried out by CLAIR and the Ministry of Education?), the CIRs (Coordinator for International Relations), who are few in number, but who work in each prefecture, could serve as “net-linker” for the project. A capable person could set this up in a month, and it could then run nationally. As I am not certain whether each school could tap into this resource, I will forgo further explanation of its potential.

The Japanese staff could also create a *senpai/kohai* relationship between the ALT and JTL to assure constant supervision. Such checks and balances would ensure that the objectives set by the staff would be met, and that the ALT would feel a part of the school, a part of the program as an employee, not merely as a *seinen* (youth). Too often, ALTs are given considerable freedom and leeway which go abused or which are taken for granted. It is somewhat absurd that a 40 year old Japanese teacher would be asking a 23 year old ALT if he would be willing to grade compositions for a class; the 40 year old teacher, senior to the ALT and part of the permanent staff, should be telling the ALT that grading is part of the duties. In fact, discussing the matter should be unnecessary, as the two would have come to an agreement during orientation that grading is a fundamental duty of the ALT.

CONCLUSION

Onoda pointed out in her 1994 article that, “*the jury is still out on team-teaching*”. One fundamental flaw with this observation is that re-inventing team-teaching on an ongoing basis is unproductive, and therefore is akin to a criminal justice system in which judges are taxed and trials delayed for years because nothing changes structurally. Structure and permanence are needed in team-teaching; amidst teacher transfers and ALT departures, much good work has vanished. More importantly, Japanese teachers need to weigh local needs, ALT strengths, and teachers’ objectives in developing a direction for a language course. Noam Chomsky devised a systematic way of looking at grammar and how it functions with respect to language based on mathematical principles. Essentially, he lent form to what existed, yet he placed emphasis on the productive or creative character of language through transformational generative grammar. Likewise, Japanese teachers have to learn not to use the ALT by simply glancing at a lesson plan and trying to figure

out where the ALT can fit in. Nor are they going to effectively employ this rich human resource by leaving lessons up to the ALT so that they can take a break. There needs to be systematic development: creation of objectives, expansion of objectives, the creation of projects/programs/efforts to meet the objectives and better develop student skills (particularly in aural-oral areas). All of this could be better accomplished if the ALT were incorporated into a language program as a human resource.

What would be the likely outcome of this enhanced, bolstered basic foreign language program? Dare I speculate..... higher scores on entrance examinations, ultimately? After ten years in a whirlpool, it might be a good time to start.

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