

# ALT HANDBOOK 2011

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## Introduction

### **Purpose**

The *ALT Handbook* is one of the core JET Programme publications produced by CLAIR. Its purpose is to provide information for JET participants on teaching in Japan and how to adapt to their workplaces.

### **Resources**

This book and the complimentary online resource materials are a collection of information handed down by participants of the former British English Teachers Scheme (BETS), the Monbusho English Fellows (MEF) Programme, as well as past and current JET Programme participants.

Previously known as the *Resource and Teaching Materials Handbook*, this book was greatly reduced in response to surveys conducted regarding participant use of the information; many people stated a preference for having teaching materials available online. In response, we have split the material in two, providing *Resource Materials* in an online format. A PDF version of the *ALT handbook* is also available on the JET Programme homepage at: [www.jetprogramme.org/e/current/publications.html](http://www.jetprogramme.org/e/current/publications.html)

You can also visit our forums where JET participants are able to share lesson plan ideas at: [www.jetprogramme.org/forums](http://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 out copies to non-JET participants, and our print-run does not allow for sending out extra copies to JETs. If you need an extra copy, please download the PDF format from our website ([www.jetprogramme.org](http://www.jetprogramme.org)). Thank you for your understanding.

### **And Finally**

We hope that you find this handbook and the complementary online materials useful but we are always happy to receive feedback. 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](http://www.jetprogramme.org/forums)) or contact us directly at [jet@clair.or.jp](mailto:jet@clair.or.jp).

The Editors

## Commonly used expressions, abbreviations and Japanese words

### Titles and Institutions

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

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

### School-Related

<b>bukatsu</b>	- extra curricular/after school activities
<b>byokyu</b>	- sick leave (paid)
<b>chugakko</b>	- junior high school
<b>daigaku</b>	- university
<b>daikyu</b>	- compensatory holiday
<b>eigo</b>	- English
<b>Eikaiwa</b>	- English conversation
<b>ichi-nensei</b>	- first year
<b>kocho sensei</b>	- headmaster / principal

<b>koko</b>	- senior high school
<b>kyoto sensei</b>	- deputy head / vice-principal
<b>kyushoku</b>	- school lunch
<b>nenkyu</b>	- annual paid holiday
<b>nihongo</b>	- Japanese language
<b>ni-nensei</b>	- second year
<b>OHP</b>	- overhead projector
<b>san-nensei</b>	- third year
<b>seito</b>	- students
<b>sempai</b>	- elder, senior, mentor
<b>sensei</b>	- teacher; form of address for teachers
<b>shogakko</b>	- primary / elementary school
<b>yasumi</b>	- holiday, rest, break, day off
<b>yochien</b>	- kindergarten
<b>zangyo</b>	- overtime

### Work-Related

<b>bonenkai</b>	- end of year party
<b>enkai</b>	- party
<b>gaman</b>	- patience, tolerance, perseverance
<b>giri</b>	- obligation
<b>honne</b>	- real intention, true feelings
<b>kangeikai</b>	- welcome party
<b>nijikai</b>	- second party following the enkai
<b>omiyage</b>	- souvenir gifts
<b>shinnenkai</b>	- New Year party
<b>sobetsukai</b>	- farewell party
<b>tatemae</b>	- saying and doing what is expected

### Other Commonly Used Words

<b>bento</b>	- packed (boxed) lunch
<b>genki</b>	- well-being, energetic
<b>gambatte</b>	- do your best (command)
<b>daijobu</b>	- okay, no problem
<b>dame</b>	- no good, not acceptable
<b>dozo</b>	- help yourself, go ahead
<b>gai(koku)jin</b>	- foreigner
<b>genki</b>	- lively, well
<b>hiragana</b>	- Japanese syllabary
<b>inaka</b>	- rural areas
<b>kokusaika</b>	- internationalisation
<b>kanji</b>	- Chinese characters
<b>katakana</b>	- Japanese syllabary used for foreign words
<b>katakana eigo</b>	- Japanese pronunciation of English
<b>meishi</b>	- business cards
<b>romaji</b>	- Romanisation of Japanese (the Hepburn system is used throughout)

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# The Workplace

## CONTRACTING ORGANISATIONS

All JETs are appointed by a contracting organisation; JETs are not employed by the JET Programme, CLAIR, or the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (*Monbukagakusho*, or MEXT). The contracting organisation is responsible for the JET's working life. It is very important that you know who your contracting organisation 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***

A large number of ALTs are employed by the board of education in the prefecture or designated city in which they are placed. The boards of education then place the ALTs in either schools or regional education offices in their jurisdiction. There is typically a person in charge of ALTs in the main office located in the prefectural capital, and they are the person in charge of the JETs. 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 Town, City 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 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 policy towards the JET will be determined by local officials. Town, city or village ALTs usually work in one or more schools, and may be asked to become involved in other educational or international exchange projects organised by their contracting organisations.

### ***A Private School***

Private schools often employ ALTs. 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 who you should address your questions to and what everyone's role is.

## WORK RELATIONS

### ***First Impressions***

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 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 (*jimucho*) and any people you are introduced to. Your new colleagues will appreciate

any effort you make to speak Japanese, especially if they are not confident in your language. 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 coworkers. 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. The following are some things you should bear in mind when you are at work:

- Be punctual. Find out when you are expected to be at work and arrange to arrive a little earlier at all times.
- Dress appropriately. Appearance matters, so try to ascertain what kind of dress is expected of you. Dress more conservatively than you would back home. You would probably be better off avoiding anything too casual or unconventional.
- 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.
- 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 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 a present (*omiyage*) for the staff members to share.
- **Do not lose your temper or become too emotional during work hours.** This kind of

behaviour is considered to be childish and could result in serious damage to the perception your workmates have of you.

- Smile and be enthusiastic. This will automatically make you more approachable.

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 new 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 the new member of staff, 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 / Fax 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, is likely to cause resentment. However, as calls to CLAIR are considered to be work-related, your contracting organisation should allow you to call CLAIR 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 not appropriate.

### **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 what the protocol is. 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 good graphics to adapt for your own activities.

## ALTS' DAILY WORK

The following information is provided to give ALTs an overview of the different types of duties that they may find themselves doing. Be aware, however, that the descriptions change with each contracting organisation, and that it is the contracting organisation's prerogative to decide exactly what each ALT will do. ALTs teach in a variety of different classroom situations in a variety of different schools.

### **Junior High School**

Junior High School (JHS) students are between the ages of twelve and fifteen years. As there is no entrance examination required, JHS classes may have students of very different abilities. The classes are usually large and, in many situations, the students will be starting formal language learning for the first time. There can be a big difference between the atmosphere of first year classes, which can be very active and enthusiastic, and that of third year classes. The ALT should be prepared for dealing with students at different developmental stages and students with varying attitudes. JHS can be very rewarding, but at the same time it requires a great deal of energy and teaching commitment on the part of the ALT.

### **Senior High School**

Senior High School (SHS) students are aged between 16 and 18. Although SHS is not compulsory in Japan, about 98% of students continue their education at this level. Unlike JHS, entry into SHS is determined by entrance examinations, which means the abilities of the students can vary greatly according to the school. There are many types of schools, including those offering vocational courses such as agricultural or fishery schools, and many different academic levels. SHS students can be self-conscious about speaking a foreign language in front of their peers, and students in some classes may be very quiet. However, although this is certainly not the case in all schools, it is important to be patient and to give your students a great deal of encouragement.

### **Elementary (Primary) School Visits**

An increasing number of ALTs are being asked to visit elementary (primary) schools. Starting in 2002, elementary schools had the option of making English a compulsory subject, and in 2011 it became compulsory at the fifth and sixth grade level. At elementary schools, ALTs may find themselves teaching simple greetings, basic conversation, playing games, singing songs, doing skits, short plays or other oral/aural activities. Activities will vary according to the ages and interests of the students. ALTs may find themselves taking part in activities at school such as physical education, music, art, cooking or calligraphy classes. They may also be involved in culture-based activities, for example, introducing and playing games from the ALT's home country, playing Japanese games introduced by students, preparing materials for a holiday celebration, etc. The ALT's involvement and activities will vary according to the wishes of the school and the frequency of visits there.



### **Extra-Curricular Activities (Bukatsudo)**

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 or 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 out 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.



### 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 - 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.

## 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 member of staff.
- 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 fifty 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 (*Kyoho 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. A happy event and 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 and 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 enkaï 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 and 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, such as running in track races, or to help with cheering, passing out beverages, or holding the finishing tape etc.

### **School Trip (*shugakuryoko*)**

In the first and second semesters, the second grade students depart on a three-day trip (*shugakuryoko*) 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 and possibly a nightcap 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 often the norm 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, *enkais* 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 *enkais* 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 cha 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 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. During the the times when students are on holidays, Japanese teachers who do not have any particular duties such as teaching extra classes, club activities or supervising the school premises may be allowed to apply to take study leave. 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, 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

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 JETs 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 JTL newsletter is a good idea and a great way of keeping in touch with your JTLs. 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 JTLs 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 JTLs 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 JTL 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.

## 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 JTLs 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

- Humour: 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.

### **Who Can You Turn To at School?**

You can enlist the help of your supervisor or “go-between” for certain things such as privacy.

### **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.

### **Prefectural Advisor**

In order to provide a local support network for JETs in Japan, CLAIR introduced the Prefectural Advisor (PA) system. In each prefecture and designated city in Japan, there are generally at least two PAs, one Japanese staff, and one JET. In many prefectures, one of the PAs is an ALT. PAs attend two conferences in Tokyo during the JET year where they receive training and advice about counselling techniques. PAs are not professional counsellors but can help you find information on professional counsellors if necessary.

The purpose of the PA system is to provide JETs with a local contact, someone that they can talk to or ask questions. With so many ALTs on the JET Programme, there are bound to be some difficulties. Many of these result from work-based problems. PAs who are also ALTs are a very valuable resource for ALTs who are working in the Japanese education system for the first time. As an ALT, your PA has first-hand knowledge of the system that you are working in and of living in Japan, and can therefore provide you with advice on how to deal with any problems that you might encounter. In addition, they can provide you with information about the area that you are living in, and all calls are treated confidentially.

A PA receives calls from people asking for advice about Japanese teachers and team-teaching and how to handle difficult situations at work. Most people just want to hear someone else’s point of view or to know what would be the appropriate way to handle a specific situation in Japan. PAs may also receive calls about medical services and local facilities. In some cases, where the contracting organisation permits, a PA may accompany them when they go to see a doctor. Basically, a PA is there to listen and to help when help is needed.

## **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 JETs 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. We will not automatically take yours or the employer’s side: we are a neutral third party. All calls are confidential. If you have a problem, whether work-related or personal, we will try to help.

### **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 on whom you can “unload” all your troubles.
- 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 re-appointed JET) or CLAIR for advice.
- Keep in mind that your time as a JET 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 slow. 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.

# **Team-Teaching & Classroom Management**

## 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 (JTL) 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 all ALTs (except Chinese and Korean 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 JTLs, and should suggest activities or creative and effective ways to use the authorised Japanese textbook. Also, despite being given the title assistant, many ALTs are given a great deal of responsibility regarding the curricula and syllabi.

JTLs sometimes wonder about the effectiveness of having an ALT. Often the ALT does not speak Japanese, has had no formal training in teaching, not to mention teaching English as a Foreign Language, and most importantly, probably has little or no understanding or experience regarding the educational system in Japan. Additionally, whether due to language or other challenges, some JTLs find it difficult to work with ALTs. However, ALTs are uniquely equipped to engage in communicative education. An ALT can make foreign language learning more immediate and real for the students. S/he can speak from personal experience about a foreign culture, and breathe the new life into a text by building upon it with these experiences. S/he can also help to improve the JTLs' language ability, confidence and teaching skills. Many JTLs complain that they never have the opportunity to speak with native speakers; with an ALT, however, there is ample opportunity to do so. An ALT usually has the opportunity to meet the JTL many times, either during or after school hours. It is through team-teaching with the JTL that the influence of the ALT can reach the greatest number of students, not just this year, but for as long as the JTL teaches.

Some Japanese teachers may suggest that their students do not like the foreign language and cannot speak it very well. These problems may be a result of language instruction aimed primarily at fostering reading, not speaking skills. The JTL may have been trained in this method and see it as the only desirable way to teach. The ALT, having been exposed to a different educational system, may have been exposed to alternative ways of instruction, which s/he can use alongside the more traditional teaching methods. The close contact that is possible between the ALT and the JTL 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 otherwise create alone.

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 JTLs will be one of the biggest challenges and one of the most rewarding aspects of life as a JET. Good cooperation between the ALT and the JTL 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 JTL can employ everyday (without the ALT) to increase the effectiveness of his/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 practice 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 JTL'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/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 s/he should show interest in the students and in making the lesson special for them.

### ***Make the Lesson 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 s/he sets in class is very important. Teachers must constantly encourage participation without fear. This is very important. The ALT and JTL 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. Don't 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 JTL 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 Pairwork and Groupwork Activities***

Introducing pairwork 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 groupwork, 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 Ken and Mary. Make flash cards and pictures for your lesson. Do not be shy about acting or drawing on the board.

## **LESSON PLANNING**

Before starting to plan a lesson the key thing to remember is that it will be presented by a team of two teachers, therefore needs to be planned by the team. Make sure that both you and the JTL have an active role in the lesson. Work together to plan each step of the lesson. This may mean staying an hour later than you are required to in order to catch the JTL with a few minutes to spare. You and the JTL will find that the lesson runs much more smoothly with team preparation.

For a lesson, first determine the aims and objectives. Your first move might be to talk with the JTL to find out exactly what the students have studied and are studying at present. In some cases, JTLs may limit the ALT's role to “letting the students enjoy speaking with a foreigner”, model reading, and pronunciation. The JTL uses the remaining time to explain grammar points or translate new vocabulary and idioms introduced in the text. Both activities (the ALT's and the JTL's) are “teacher-centred”. Consider an alternative, forming a “student-centred” lesson. What does the JTL want the students to do? What activities can the ALT and JTL team introduce to aid the students in accomplishing the lesson's goal(s)?

You might want to make a standardised lesson plan form to plan each lesson. Using a standard form makes it much easier to create an organised lesson. Such a form encourages the JTL to prepare in advance and it provides something to work from during the pre-class meeting. It is also useful for note-taking during class or to use during a post-class meeting. Not all teachers in Japan prepare lesson plans as you might expect. Work together and see what you are both willing to give in the lesson and how you want to present it together.

JTLs might be sceptical about their students' ability to understand successfully and thereby hesitant about performing the activities you suggest. Their underlying concern may be whether or not it prepares the students for the entrance examination. This is not a concern for the ALT to ignore or mock. The JTLs have pressure from other teachers, parents and even from the students themselves to prepare them for the exam, and this should be taken into consideration when planning a lesson. The JTL may therefore feel that grammar translation is more important, whereas the ALT may feel that speaking is more important, but there are four components of language and all four need to be incorporated into the lesson if possible. The most important part is that the students can understand and apply language principles whether it be on an

examination or in everyday life. Such abilities also motivate the students to study because they can see the usefulness of their efforts; the language studied can actually be used to communicate!

ALTs will find themselves in a variety of teaching situations dealing with a wide range of abilities. It would be impossible to provide detailed help for everybody in an article like this, but there are a few “rules of thumb” for lesson planning, applicable to any situation. The main message is: be organised and know where you are heading. Make sure you know exactly what you are trying to teach (aims), what material you are going to use and how you are going to teach it (methods). If you are not really clear about this, the students certainly will not be, and you may end up with problems. It is better to over-prepare than under-prepare your lessons at first. Few people can regularly ad-lib and still have successful lessons, although it has happened to us all at some time. After a few lessons with a class, you will develop a feel for the amount of material needed.

Some JTLs may be extremely busy, so develop your skills in cross-cultural communication to gradually build trust. Find a way that works in your situation for planning. This may involve writing out ideas, meeting with a JTL in private time, etc.

## INITIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Get to know your situation. Either spend a bit of time just watching the students you will teach or, if possible, find out from someone who taught there before. You need to establish:

- Level of language ability, especially in terms of what they can produce. Often most of their knowledge is passive (listening and reading). Therefore, they may find it difficult to speak.
- Whether or not they have been encouraged to use the language in class before. If not, you are going to have to build their confidence and slowly overcome their inhibitions.
- How many students, on average, you will have in a class. This will affect the complexity of what you can do and how rigidly organised you will have to be.
- Whether or not you can do anything you like, whether you have to relate to a specific textbook or set of expectations from the school (or a combination of the two).
- What the respective roles of you and the JTLs are. Whoever is teaching at a given point, a student-centred class with communicative activities is beneficial to the students.
- Where students are in their textbooks and what language, grammar, vocabulary and other points they have covered. (However, do not assume that they know points previously taught or that they can use them when you plan your lessons. You will probably have to re-introduce and revise many grammar points.)

Try to ensure that you get a very definite idea of what is required of you. This avoids the situation of being told what you must teach five minutes before the lesson begins. An off-the-cuff lesson can occasionally be successful but generally is a recipe for dissatisfaction on the part of both the teacher(s) and the students.

## PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

In an ideal case, rather than just planning each lesson on an ad hoc basis, you would plan a syllabus in which each lesson builds on the last and adds to it. Therefore your overall aims for the students, as well as the specific aims for each lesson, need to be established. They can be skill-based: listening, speaking, reading and writing; and/or language based: structure, function and vocabulary. Other factors affecting your overall and specific aims include: the number of lessons you have with a class, the length of the lessons, and how long it will take to revise/check/re-introduce the language necessary. A general objective is to get the students to understand and use the language as much as possible.

### **Fill-ins**

It is a good idea to have a bank of 10-15 minutes activities based on language the students have covered or will cover. Sometimes class finishes earlier than expected or a planned activity

will not work with a particular class. The online resource and materials guide has many interesting exercises which can easily be used or adapted.

### **Material Preparation**

Have your material ready well before the lesson. A last minute rush to the photocopier only to find a long queue or that it is out of order is guaranteed to increase your chances of high blood pressure and chaos in the next lesson! Discuss what you want to do beforehand, especially if planning anything which could be seen as “new”. Your Japanese colleague may be able to foresee difficulties that you can then tackle before you try out your ideas.

### **Equipment**

Check any equipment you are intending to use before the lesson, e.g. the computer, CD player, smart board, or projector. Even if you have used such equipment on previous occasions, your school's may not work in quite the same way. In any case, batteries may need to be replaced or machines collected from a particular place. Familiarise yourself with your school's system for using equipment. Do you need to book it in advance? Are there special rooms for showing videos and slides? If so, how do you obtain access? A few minutes finding out when you first arrive can save much panic later on. If you are unfamiliar with such equipment and plan to use it, ask if you can have a demonstration/practice session sometime.

If you are using a tape recorder do not forget there is often a reset button. You can set it at “000” after you find the place you want on the tape and play the tape for as long as necessary, for example the tape may play to “264”. If you need to rewind the tape and play it again for the students, you can simply rewind the tape to “000” and the tape is back to the place where it started. This is quite useful when using music in the classroom, too.

### **Arrangement of the Classroom**

If possible, see your classrooms before teaching in them so that you have an idea of what you physically can and cannot do in them. For pairwork arrange the desks (or simply the chairs) in such a way to encourage one-to-one cooperation. Check that it is alright to move the furniture. If you explain why you want to do it, there should be no problem. Then work out a simple command to use with the students to get them and the chairs to go to the right places. If you cannot move the furniture (as in a lecture theatre or a language lab), decide how they are going to do the tasks you set them. A general rule for good classroom relationships is to sit as far apart as possible (especially in mixed classes). This makes the task more difficult, so spend five minutes at the beginning of the lesson checking that the students are sitting where you want them to. As for getting boys and girls to sit and work together, a certain amount of sensitivity is necessary, and you will have to decide whether your efforts are actually contributing towards a greater use of the foreign language in the classroom, the main reason for your presence!

## **SETTING AND MARKING EXAMS**

ALTs may be asked to set 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 set 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, from masculine to feminine, 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.

## 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 JTLs 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 JTL, 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 JTL some good ideas on how to improve his/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.

### *Dealing with Disruption*

In Japan it is thought that all students have the right to be in the classroom, so you will not 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 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.

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. **Don't 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 JTL 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 s/he 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.

### ***Awkward Questions***

One typical question is “Do you find ‘X’ sensei irresistibly 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 JETs 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 JETs believe that discretion should be maintained on this point, no matter how innocently the question was intended. Questions can either be answered with the exact same question back at the students or completely ignored. If you feel that a certain question is inappropriate for your classroom you may want to discuss it with the JTL 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.**

### ***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 JTL 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 JTLs 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 JTL and find out what the options are in helping to get the student involved in the lesson.

### ***Mobile Phones (keitai denwa)***

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 JTL 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 JTLs 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 JTLs 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 judgement 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 JTL

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.
- If you see a student being hit, you may feel distressed, and concerned about what you should do. If you want to talk about what happened, you can call your Prefectural Advisor (PA), a Programme Coordinator at CLAIR or TELL (Tokyo English Lifeline) to discuss your feelings. (JETLINE 03-5213-1729, TELL 03-5774-0992)

## SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION

Until recently in Japan, special needs education was given very low priority. Traditional Japanese beliefs considered children with special needs to be a disgraceful or shameful matter for a family. Children were kept at home, and were seldom seen out in the community. Fortunately this attitude is changing, and 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, with about 8 students per class. 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, 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.

## FIRST YEAR JUNIOR HIGH STUDENTS

Teaching first-year students in their first term at JHS can be challenging. Sometimes, all the students can handle is the alphabet, but do not despair. There are quite a few advantages to teaching students during this time. For one, they are really excited about learning a foreign language and even more excited that a foreigner has come to teach them. Also, the students may not be as shy or withdrawn as older students, and may be more enthusiastic about participating in lessons. The following are suggested activities:

- **Greeting Practice:** After saying your name, write "Nice to meet you" on the board. Have the students practice saying it as a group. Then, walk around having selected students (or all) say, "My name is .... Nice to meet you". Shake their hands. It may sound too simplistic, but it helps lessen the tension, and students enjoy it immensely. Do not forget to have them shake each other's hands too.
- **Simplified Introduction:** You will be very surprised at what the students can understand between gestures and drawings on the board. Give it a try.
- **Simple Songs Try:** "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes", etc.
- **Sing "The Alphabet Song"** or have them write the alphabet as they sing the song. Make alphabet flashcards. Paste in pictures of objects whose spellings begin with the letter shown.
- **Alphabet Race:** Make a row of students into one team. Time them as they run through the alphabet. (The first person shouts "A", the second, "B", etc.)
- **Alphabet Guess:** Have the students close their eyes. Write one letter on the board and cover half of it with a piece of paper. Have them open their eyes and try to guess what letter it is.
- **Alphabet Circle:** Teach the students the words "capital" and "lower-case" as you write the ABCs/abcs on the board all out of order. Split the class into two teams. Each team has one piece of different coloured chalk. As you call out the letters, the students with the chalk run up to circle all the corresponding letters they can find. After each letter, they must hand the chalk to a different person on their team. At the end, just tally up the different coloured circles to determine the winner. A variation of this game is to have the students write the letters themselves.
- **Pronunciation:** Pronunciation can form the basis for reading and writing in later study by giving the students the fundamental rules of sounds and spellings. It can also be helpful for slow learners. You can begin with the first-year students as follows:
  - Separate the consonants from the vowels.
  - Teach the names and sounds of the ABCs. For example: "A" is "ay", "B" is "be".
  - Teach them that vowels and certain consonants have more than one sound. C(s/k), G (g/j), S(s/z), X(z/cks)
  - Teach the basic combinations. Ch, Th, Ph, Sh, Wh, Cr, etc.

- Do not forget to exaggerate facial, mouth, and lip movements.
- Teach them to sound words out.
- Begin with words that rhyme and that can be easily illustrated. For example: bat, rat, fat, hat, cat, cap, map, can, man, pan, van. Once they have got the hang of it, change the vowels and introduce minimal pairs: Pan/pen; hat/hit. Later, go on to two syllable words: pan/Japan. Once they can associate sounds with letters, you can move on to spelling and writing.

## 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 fathers 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. And 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 visiting 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 do 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, s/he 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 is in the "returnee students" English class. Try to assess the level of the student's English. Even if s/he 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 be more creative. And 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.

## WHAT KIND OF SCHOOL ARE YOU TEACHING AT?

The Japanese education system has a broad range of schools. Both elementary and junior high education is compulsory in Japan. In general, all public elementary schools and junior high schools have a similar curriculum across Japan. There are minor variations in the curriculum and textbooks used in junior high schools, so textbooks at your school likely will be similar, although not necessarily identical, to those used at neighboring schools.

The difference between schools is most obvious at senior high schools. Over 90 percent of students in Japan graduate senior high school. Japan has a diverse workforce, so the scope of education and range of skills taught has been designed to meet national economic goals. It is important that all students feel supported in their educational choice, no matter what the focus of their studies are.

About two thirds of schools focus on academic courses and entry into university. Other schools allow students to specialize in skills for employment in a wide range of industries like commerce, industrial design and manufacturing, farming, fishing and nursing. High school entrance is determined by examination, and there may be strong competition to enter specific schools.

If you are at high school, be aware of the educational priorities of your high school. This will help you fit into the curriculum as an ALT and improve the contribution you make to your students.

If the focus is primarily on entrance into university, the curriculum will be focused on the reading, writing and listening skills needed for exams. Talk to your teachers about the types of exams and interviews your students may face. It is often likely that your students' written ability will be much higher than their motivation to speak.

If you are at a school that teaches specialist courses, your students will have a very broad range of academic ability. Some will be at the school because they have a specific interest in the curriculum offered, and it may be the only place to study this. Others may be there because they did not get accepted to their first choice. Keep in mind that some of your students will be going on to university and others will not.

This type of school provides a unique challenge. There will be a mix of highly motivated, successful students with excellent study habits, whilst some students may feel that school is difficult and likely to get harder, so they may not be as motivated. Some students may even have mild learning difficulties, but they can often be minimized by good classroom techniques. However, all students have the right to feel valued at school. Making a positive connection with a high energy, lower achieving student can improve the learning atmosphere and outcome for both the individual and the class as a whole.

Teaching at a specialist school means you need to think carefully about how to motivate students. The key is relevance to student. Your colleagues can usually tell you what the students are most interested in. Talk with your colleagues about how you can use your time most effectively. You may have the choice of using the text book directly or indirectly. You may be able to teach English around the specific courses that the students are taking.

No two schools are alike. Teaching at a high profile academic school may mean that you have very motivated students with a high level of English ability, but far less time to focus on communicative English activities, as students must prepare for university entrance examinations. There are advantages and disadvantages to every type of school out there, so try to approach your situation objectively.

## STUDENT MOTIVATION

To study a language you must have two things. The first thing is motivation, and the second thing is motivation. A little corny, but motivation is the all important factor and it is so in any form of study or education. Motivation is either intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation as the name suggests 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 again as the name suggests is brought about by influence from outside the individual. In schools it can take the form of examinations, tests and completion of the *naishinsho*, 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.

Many JTLs do not usually talk to their students in the target language, therefore ALTs should use as much of their native language as possible when communicating with their students. The instructions and feed-back 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 JETs) 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 and their reality can motivate them to try to meet you halfway. 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! *Ganbatte!*

**Simple Questions** - Ask simple questions that you may think are too easy or even stupid to ask. Chances are it will be an encouragement and a motivator if the student is able to answer the question (no matter how simple the question). It shows that communication is possible. Pitch your language so that it can be understood and do not use unnecessary words.

## 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; 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 JTL. 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 may well be asked to make speeches, especially if your level of Japanese is good or you are in your second year in Japan. 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 a 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 so that you can keep track of 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 JTL seminars. One is the 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 JTLs 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 JTLs 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(s) have 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 JTLs 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 JTLs, 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 JTLs 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 JTLs, 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 JTLs 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 JTLs 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
- internationalisation
- the school system

\*\*\*Do not criticise teaching techniques!

# **Teaching Theories & the Four Language Components**

## WHAT IS TEFL/TESL?

As you become more immersed in your life in Japan you will undoubtedly become acquainted with the many acronyms associated with the English teaching profession. Strictly speaking, TESL refers to Teaching English as a Second Language, that is, teaching English to people who will have to function in an English-speaking environment, i.e. immigrants, refugees, foreign students, etc. What the JET Programme proposes to do is more accurately referred to as TEFL or Teaching English (French, German, Chinese, or Korean) as a Foreign Language - in other words, teaching a language that is not required for daily living and where opportunities for utilisation are limited. Your job as an ALT is to expand these opportunities and to motivate your students and colleagues in their study of the target language.

This section of the teaching handbook will seek to give you practical information related to the English teaching field that you can readily and easily use as you plan lessons and team - teach in your new job.

The first two parts will focus on the use of the grammar-translation method and the current trend towards communicative language teaching. As much as possible, relevant examples from the classroom and daily life have been employed so that you can see how these particular theoretical perspectives on language teaching and learning have influenced foreign language teaching in Japan.

The next section will be devoted to showing how a communicative method can be applied to each skill area you may be asked to teach. Again, the focus will be on the practical - how you can incorporate communicative tasks into your teaching. You can receive complimentary copies of EFL texts from publishers in Japan. However, the point is to be able to take the materials at hand (i.e. the MEXT authorised textbook) and your copy machine, and to teach with it in a communicative way.

Further information about language teaching methods and principles can be found in the *MEXT Handbook for Team-Teaching*.

## LANGUAGE TEACHING IN JAPAN

### **THE GRAMMAR TRANSLATION METHOD**

The method and goal of the grammar translation method are apparent just from the name. The main objective is to translate from the native language to the target (studied) language and vice versa. This is done through the intensive study of vocabulary and grammar rules in a deductive way. That is, the teacher presents and explains a grammar rule which is then practised through translation. Because grammar is taught outside of communicative goals or discourse, the focus is on the sentence-level. The relationship between sentences (i.e. meaning) is not necessarily relevant. Generally this explanation is given in the native language. Thus, though students might develop some competence in the target language, they will continue to use their first language as a referent. Oral practice, with the exception of the recitation of texts, is completely absent.

As a means of teaching language for communicative purposes, the shortcomings of the grammar translation method are obvious. However, that was never the goal of the method's German proponents. Rather, the grammar translation method was the application of traditional methods of studying classical languages such as Greek and Latin to modern languages. Language was considered not to be that much different from teaching mathematic or scientific rules. The point was not communicative competence, but intellectual rigour. The study of language was not an end unto itself but a means of acquiring mental discipline.

The attractions of grammar translation for a country hitherto isolated from foreign influence are manifold. Teachers did not have to be communicatively competent in the language they were teaching. Students' main contact with the language was usually through books which the

grammar translation could (and often does) render comprehensible. The country was able to gain access to international developments in science and industry even though there was limited contact with foreigners. Finally, the philosophical underpinnings provided by the grammar translation method allowed success in the tasks dictated by the method (i.e. the memorisation of vocabulary and grammar rules) to be equated with general intellectual capability. Thus English ability as defined by the grammar translation method came to be a part of the examination system.

The examination system is one of the main causes for the continuing use of grammar translation in Japanese schools. It continues to be an efficient and effective means of cramming the huge amount of English trivia necessary for examination success into the heads of aspiring university students. Although this is changing and some universities are making their exams more communicative in nature, school teachers and students still feel great pressure to study isolated points of grammar and lexical terms in preparation for the entrance exams.

Aside from the continuing predominance of the examination system, many of the reasons for the slow decline of the grammar translation method in Japan are practical. Many language teachers have not had the chance or the time (given their numerous other duties) to practice their language skills because of limited opportunities to travel abroad or interact with foreigners. They may feel more comfortable teaching grammar and vocabulary as they can continue to rely on Japanese as a medium of instruction. Also, language classes in Japan are very large. Grammar translation, because it treats language as a body of knowledge that can be passed from teacher to student using traditional methods such as lecturing, allows the teacher to maintain control of the classroom easily.

### **EFFECTS OF GRAMMAR/TRANSLATION ON CLASSES**

- Many teachers continue to rely on Japanese for foreign language instruction.
- Classes are teacher-centred. The teacher lectures about a given point of grammar. There is little interaction on the part of the students.
- When oral skills are taught, they may be formulaic (i.e. A: "How are you?" B: "I am fine thank you"). In other words, conversation is also taught in terms of unbreakable rules rather than as strategies for communicating.
- Students rely on Japanese-English or English-Japanese dictionaries, and so will often use words in an incorrect way because they are unfamiliar with the language usage.
- Students may be able to give explanations of grammar points in Japanese, but are unable to use the language in communicative situations.
- Since accuracy is stressed, students may be corrected when they make a mistake, even if what they were saying or writing is understandable to the listener or reader.
- In a grammar-based syllabus, language elements may be presented and practiced outside of meaningful contexts.

Although the preceding list may paint a dire picture of teaching conditions, it is only a list of possibilities. In all likelihood, your colleagues will be more enlightened in their teaching practices. More communicative methods of language teaching are becoming more common. ALTs have been and continue to be a significant part of that trend.

## **COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING**

As you will quickly ascertain, "communicative" is the leading buzzword in English language teaching in Japan. Just because something is called communicative, however, does not make it so. The purpose of this section will be to give some background on the evolution of communicative language teaching so that you may develop criteria for judging exactly what is communicative and thus aid your team-teaching partners in designing communicative lessons for your students.

Communicative language teaching (CLT) can be quickly defined in contrast to other older

language teaching methodologies. In other methods, such as the grammar-translation method, the focus is on form and hence there is a preoccupation with the learning of grammatical rules and vocabulary. In CLT we are most concerned with the utilisation of language. Although language elements are important, they are only important insofar as they are tools for communication. The focus is on teaching students about utilising language to achieve communicative goals. In the technical terms of ESL, this is called the primacy of fluency over accuracy.

The emphasis on fluency instead of accuracy also means that in certain situations mistakes are tolerated. Language learning is viewed as a process in which the development of fluency is a process of trial and error. Mistakes are a natural part of learning. Thus, students in a communicative classroom are encouraged to try to communicate from day one, even with a limited knowledge of language.

The second difference between CLT and other methods involves the role of the teacher. In grammar translation, learning is a one-way process of knowledge passing from teacher to student. In contrast, you will often hear CLT described as “student-centred”. If the ultimate goal of language learning is the use of language for communicative means, then it follows that students will be more active participants in a classroom employing a communicative approach. Teachers will play important roles as facilitators and serve as resources in a communicative classroom.

A more detailed comparison of a classroom employing the grammar translation method versus one using the communicative approach can provide you with a better idea of exactly how the basic tenets of CLT are manifested.

To a person used to traditional educational environments, a CLT classroom can seem dynamic or chaotic, depending on his/her point of view. It may seem noisy because students are trying to talk to one another in the target language. The teacher may seem to be just wandering about from student to student instead of asserting his/her presence in the classroom. In monitoring the students' work, the teacher will move around the classroom rather than stand in front of the class as a central authority. The classroom may be physically disrupted as students move chairs and desks to do pair work and group work.

However, while the teacher's role has been overtly reduced in the classroom, in reality CLT requires a great deal more thought and energy than other language teaching methods. During a grammar translation lesson, the teacher can read from notes while students record what is being said. In CLT the teacher must spend time thinking how best to activate students' interest in the lesson and design activities so that students will feel motivated to communicate.

As an ALT and as a speaker of the target language, you have an important role to play in motivating students to communicate using the target language, as well as assisting with the designing of appropriate activities to give students the opportunity to use the language they have learned. For this reason, you are ideally suited to help your JTLs introduce CLT into your team-taught classes. The challenge is how to do so under less than perfect circumstances.

## TEACHING READING

In reading classes, often the focus is on decoding the text. Students may read a passage from their textbook a number of times, memorise it and translate it into Japanese in order to “understand” the passage.

When reading, a Japanese student will often give attention to understanding the structure of each sentence and the exact meaning of each word. The net result is that Japanese students are often not very efficient when they read in a foreign language. While native speakers routinely employ a variety of reading strategies, such as skimming (reading to obtain general understanding) or scanning (reading for specific items of information), students preoccupied with understanding every word may be at a loss as to how to approach different reading tasks.

## **A STANDARD READING LESSON**

In the realm of ESL, a standard “communicative” reading lesson would consist of three parts: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading.

### ***Pre-Reading***

The basic point of pre-reading exercises is to provide explanations of new vocabulary and new grammar points as well as introducing topic-related material or questions that will allow students to understand what they are reading. In presenting new language elements, JTLs may give explanations in Japanese. In such cases, you can provide examples to show how the language is used in context so students can become familiar with it. This way they will not only know the meaning in Japanese, but will also have some idea of the usage.

Perhaps the most important tool that one can provide to students is to direct their attention to what they already know about the subject of the reading passage that they are about to encounter. This part of pre-reading activities is called in ESL lingo “the activation of students’ global knowledge” or schema. When a teacher encourages students to think about the subject of a textbook beforehand, that student’s knowledge of the subject will add to their ability to decipher it. This can be done many different ways - by asking students questions about their own experiences relating to the subject of the text, by using additional material (i.e. songs, pictures, charts, etc.), or by relating information about the subject based on your own cultural and personal experience.

For example, perhaps your students will be reading a passage about someone’s hometown. This is a subject that students will have ample knowledge about which can help orient them to their reading task. To activate this knowledge you might:

- Show pictures of your hometown with a brief description.
- Have your students answer questions about their hometowns.
- Make a mock dialogue in which you and your JTL talk about your respective hometowns.

Any of these activities would prepare your students to confront their assigned texts with a certain degree of familiarity and comfort.

### ***While-Reading***

As stated above, Japanese students have very little knowledge of the reading strategies native speakers use to elicit different kinds of information from texts. In selecting questions about reading passages, you can begin to introduce reading strategies to your students.

For example, you want students to grasp the basic meaning of the texts. You would do this by asking them to read the text once or twice, giving them one or two general questions to answer. After establishing the general meaning, you can concentrate on reading for more specific information by asking students to read again using more detailed questions to guide them. It is important to reassure students that they do not have to understand every word or sentence completely to grasp the basic meaning of what they are reading. If possible, tell the students to focus on answering the questions; this way they will not feel discouraged when every word or sentence is not completely comprehensible.

### ***Post-Reading***

During the post-reading section of a basic reading lesson, you can use the skills or knowledge students have learned as a springboard to other classroom activities. In a more traditional setting, this might involve more work with newly introduced grammar points or vocabulary.

If you are lucky enough to enjoy more flexibility, you can use any number of creative means to exploit what students have encountered in their reading lesson. To go back to the example of a reading on hometowns, you might have them create a city guide to their town, write a short impression about their hometown, or ask you questions about your hometown. The point is to extend the relevance of what has been read to other parts of your lessons.

### **A Word About Vocabulary**

Japanese students will learn most of their foreign language vocabulary through direct translation from their textbooks, dictionaries, or teachers. Although this is an efficient way of doing so, it does not provide students with strategies they can utilise when such resources are not available to them. Furthermore, it encourages a continued dependence on Japanese instead of building confidence in their ability to decode English.

Again, this will be an area where you as an ALT will probably not have a lot of room to manoeuvre. However, there are a few things you can do. Begin by combining Japanese explanations of vocabulary with simple English explanations and contextualised examples. If your JTL is enthusiastic and willing, you can also try introducing some basic exercises in guessing the meaning of words through context. You would do this by showing students how the words around an unknown word, its context, can give hints about its meaning. Of course, games are a useful and popular way of consolidating vocabulary knowledge.

## **TEACHING WRITING**

Writing is perhaps the most difficult skill to teach in a foreign language. While sentence writing is governed for the most part by easily understood grammatical rules, connecting sentences into paragraphs and paragraphs into longer passages is trickier. You begin to run into culturally dictated ideas of how information should be organised and revealed (essentially rhetoric) that are often frustrating for teachers to explain and for students to understand.

Writing is also often the most neglected part of the foreign language curriculum in Japan. When it does appear, it is all too often an adjunct to sentence-by-sentence translation from the target language into Japanese and vice versa. The problem again is that such an emphasis makes students preoccupied with the accuracy (form) while writing, instead of communication.

Due to the relative complication of teaching writing it is perhaps better to stick to the modest goal of making your students comfortable communicating in writing in a foreign language. You will have to carefully examine your textbooks and talk with your teachers to identify opportunities to do so. The ubiquitous “letter” reading passage found in most high school and junior high school texts is always a good place to start as it provides an easy model for students to follow.

If you are asked to grade students’ written work, try to work out an evaluation method where students will not be penalised if grammatical mistakes do not impede meaning. Again, you want to demonstrate that what they wish to communicate is more important than perfection in stating it. Since this runs counter to deep-seated tradition in Japanese language teaching you should work closely with your teachers when designing evaluation criteria. Perhaps you could give two marks: one for communicative ability and one for form.

Thinking creatively you can also exploit club involvement and your students’ natural interest in you to encourage writing fluency.

Encourage your students to communicate with you outside of class via letter or note. Some ALTs have also kept “ALT journals” on their desks in which students could write questions for the ALT. These methods not only encourage embryonic writing fluency, they also afford you the opportunity to connect with students on an individual basis.

## TEACHING LISTENING

Of all the skill areas that the ALTs have helped to improve, listening has probably benefited the most. Obviously, having a native speaker present greatly increases opportunities for listening practice.

The problem with teaching listening is that students often don't know what to listen for. Having had the importance of form stressed to them, students will try to understand every word that they are hearing instead of focusing on the meaning of what is being said; this is essentially a "bottom-up" approach to listening. Although this sort of approach is sometimes useful, when team-teaching, it is best to balance such an approach with "top-down" listening strategies in which students try to grasp the basic meaning of what they are listening to.

As with reading, activities can be divided into three segments: pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening.

### **Pre-Listening**

Pre-listening consists of providing tools which students can use to help them decipher what they are going to listen to. This would include necessary vocabulary, grammar points and most importantly their "global knowledge". Your JTL will probably explain vocabulary and grammar in Japanese to students, but you might want to give them contextualised examples in your language so that they know how these points will be used in the context of the listening exercise.

Your students will probably have some knowledge about the text you will use (either about the subject matter itself or about the context in which it takes place). This knowledge, when brought to their attention, becomes a powerful resource as they work through the exercise. If your listening work is going to centre around sports, you might want to focus your students' attention on that subject by asking them about their favourite sport. If you are going to have them listen to a dialogue in a restaurant, you might ask them questions about eating out, their favourite food, etc.

### **While-Listening**

As stated above, one of the biggest problems Japanese students have with listening comprehension is that they simply do not know what to listen for. When designing listening activities for your classes, make sure that the listening goal is clear. This can be done by asking questions which are related to the basic meaning of the text, to ones aimed at more specific details. Students may be asked such questions orally or be asked to fill in tables, charts, graphs etc. with information gleaned from the listening exercise. Questions should be focused on content. This is particularly important when doing "fill in the blank" or cloze exercises. If you are asked to prepare this kind of material, make sure students are listening for words that are necessary to understand the meaning (i.e. nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs). Play your tape once or twice for each set of information you wish students to listen for. Finally, make sure to tell students to listen only for the information that has been asked for. This way, they are less apt to feel defeated when every word is not immediately comprehensible.

### **Post-Listening**

The type of listening material you choose will determine what students will listen for. If you are using commercially available ESL tapes, your students will probably be able to eventually handle fairly detailed exercises about the content. Even if the listening skill of your students is relatively low, do not be afraid to use real language excerpts from TV or radio in your classes. Again, stress that they need only catch the basic meaning. Videos are a useful resource, as visual materials can stimulate students' interest in listening tasks as well as providing useful clues.

The post-listening section of a listening lesson is basically an opportunity to build upon what has been learned in the exercise itself. Traditionally this might include more grammar or vocabulary practice, or perhaps dialogue drills. You can use it more creatively in any number of ways depending upon the interests of your JTL and your students.

## TEACHING SPEAKING

Speaking is probably the skill area in which Japanese students are least confident. This is both a problem specific to language teaching and also to education in Japan in general. Older methods of language teaching, with their stress on accuracy, inculcated in students a fear of making mistakes and taking risks. In addition to this, Japanese students may feel uncomfortable about giving their opinions in front of the class and may feel vulnerable about being singled out by a foreign teacher in front of their peers.

As indicated in the section on communicative language teaching, a truly communicative student-centred classroom will always have a high degree of student input - students have to have something to communicate about, and their own feelings, ideas etc. are the easiest things to access. For a Japanese student, however, this may be the first time that such notions have been introduced into the formal setting of the classroom. Thus when introducing speaking activities, you have the double challenge of making students feel confident about speaking a foreign language, and making them comfortable with expressing their ideas and opinions.

Minor alterations or additions to traditional class activities can greatly improve their communicative potential. For example, presenting students with a re-typed version of a textbook dialogue in which several lines have been made blank so that students can practice using original information, is a relatively easy way to render it a communicative activity. The traditional pre-class banter between you and your JTLs can also provide the basis for a communicative activity. Just as you might ask your JTLs how they are, how their week is going, or what they did at the weekend, your students can ask each other as an easy communicative speaking warm-up.

The first task is to decide which speaking activities are communicative and which are not. A lot of what passes for speaking activities in Japanese classrooms is not terribly communicative. For instance, dialogues, though they purport to be written records of conversations, are not very communicative when they are practised verbatim from a textbook. Though they may provide an opportunity for practice and a framework for future communicative activities, this kind of drilling is not a communicative activity in itself.

In designing speaking activities, it is important to think of a meaningful context. For example, activities that are designed around an information gap or opinion, where meaningful information has to be exchanged to complete a task, can give a meaningful context for an activity. The use of two maps with different information, where one student has to ask for directions to a place and the other has to provide the directions, is a simple example of an information gap activity.

## PAIR WORK

In thinking about appropriate communicative speaking practice activities, it is important to note that having students talk to each other is a more efficient means of giving students the opportunity to talk than having them talk to you. As an ALT you may be asked to structure some speaking practice as teacher-centred exchanges between you and selected students. While this is an excellent way to model exercises, your students should be given frequent opportunities to practise in pairs or small groups.

Pair work is essentially the basis of communicative speaking practice. It allows students ample opportunity to practise speaking. Moreover, it allows them to do so at their own rate and without the risk involved in doing so in front of the whole class. Pairwork also allows you, the teacher, to circulate through the room so that you may act as a resource to those students that need extra help.

Pair work activities can be improvised from standard textbook materials as in the dialogue example above, or are easily made. Some ideas are surveys or questions that students can ask each other, or information gap activities in which students practise exchanging information to

draw pictures, solve puzzles, or reach some other pre-specified goal. The key is to design materials that exploit or create an information gap between students. A quick look through any commercial English language text and a bit of creativity should provide you with lots of options.

Of course whenever you are asking students to undertake a speaking activity, it is important to give them the tools necessary to do so successfully. You should discuss with your JTLs how to present needed grammar points or vocabulary, and of course, provide many examples of how the task is to be done. Modeling a task with your JTL or a student is a much more efficient way of explaining a speaking activity than trying to give verbal directions.

Finally, restrain your natural impulse to correct every error while students are undertaking a speaking activity. Though you may think you are helping, you are reinforcing their belief that only perfect utterances count. Instead, listen for common student errors which you can then present to the class as a whole at the end of the exercise. That way, you are not interrupting your students and you are not putting anyone on the spot.

## TEACHING PRONUNCIATION

Like grammar, pronunciation is often taught as a formal system of rules that seems to have little relation to communication. Moreover, students are often left with the impression that only native-like, perfect pronunciation is acceptable.

Although it is likely that you will be asked to illustrate the individual sounds (e.g. show the difference between /l/ and /r/), this is in fact only one aspect of pronunciation that you can teach. Teaching your students intonation, rhythm, stress and the way sounds become reduced in context will help the students in producing the target language as well as understanding the spoken language of native speakers.

For example, different languages have different rhythms. The best illustration of this is to think of how Japanese would sound if you took away the words and were left with only the beat of the language. Take this “machine gun” rhythm and apply it to even the best spoken English and it is rendered incomprehensible. This is because the “beat” of English is based on the stress patterns of individual words making it uneven (a stress-timed language), while in Japanese every syllable is given an equal beat (a syllable-timed language).

Another useful point for students again stems from the primacy of meaning over form. In English, for example, we can divide the words in sentences into content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) that carry the meaning of the sentence, and function words (helping verbs, pronouns, etc.). When speaking English, native speakers will give more stress to content words, while function words will often be slurred together or reduced. Thus, in American English, “I’m going to...” is often reduced to “I’m gonna”, slurring together the helping verb and “to”. Again, this point is useful for students to be aware of in order to improve their listening skills.

Also, it is very helpful to teach your students the basic aspects of intonation in your native language. For example, there are two basic types of question intonation patterns: a rising and falling one for questions that begin with who, what, when, where, why and how, and a falling one for all other questions. Also, it is possible to show students how intonation can change the meaning of an utterance. For example, a speaker saying “really” with a rising intonation can convey interest or surprise, while a falling intonation may convey a lack of interest in another person’s story. Adding this sort of information to your lessons is relatively easy, and can be fun for students. In consultation with your teachers, you should find that it is not so difficult to integrate this sort of pronunciation practice into your team-taught classes.



## **Advice from Your *Sempai***

## THE ROLE OF AN ALT IN CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

by Peter Martin

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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 wasn’t 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 JTLs you work with seem to turn blind eyes to the girls typing away on their *keitais*, the kids talking out and throwing paper-airplanes, or the boy in the front row blatantly reading manga during English class, doesn’t mean they don’t 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 realize 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 JTL allows behaviours which I wouldn't 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 JTLs. Remember that discipline is the responsibility of your Japanese counterpart, and unless your JTL 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 JTL contradicts you. Although your teaching style and attitude undoubtedly has an impact on classroom management, it's 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 JTL. Ask your JTL 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.

## 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 to 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 to 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 Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) and the Japanese Teacher of Language (JTL) is essential if lessons are to be delivered effectively, yet sometimes for JETs 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 JTL 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, JTLs 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 JTLs 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 JTL. Talk with your teachers in the staff room or in more social situations; find out about their interests outside of school 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 JTL 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. Usually, because of the emphasis on reading and writing in Japanese language education, even the most academic students have difficulties in terms of their speaking and listening abilities. 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 JTL and to try and form a working relationship. It is more than likely that the reason s/he is leaving everything to you is due to a level of uncertainty on their part. Many JTLs 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. Make a special effort to talk with them at social events outside of school and ultimately, 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 JETs 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. Given that many of your teachers may already feel self-conscious about their ability to speak in a foreign language, much less their ability to teach, you should 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 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. In fact, student-centred learning may be a completely new concept to them. 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, obvious to you. This can be frustrating. Nevertheless, avoid judging Japanese education negatively on the basis of ethnocentric 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.

# A GUIDE TO TEACHING AT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

## *Teaching Young Learners Whilst on JET*

by Trevor Laughlin

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### ***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'd be intimidated by 7 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 will be forced to explore.

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, the Monbukagakusho (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 2003, 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; Japan Times, March 3rd). 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's 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'll 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 your. 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/Taro'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 your classes ability 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:

- Talk about what they are currently doing
- Talk about what they have seen and heard
- 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)
- Use basic logic and imagination

Other characteristics can include:

- A lack of knowledge of rules that govern the world at large
- They understand situations more quickly than they do language
- 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)
- Short attention spans (Cameron, 2001; Reilly & Ward, 1997)
- Problems differentiating between fact and fiction
- 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.
- 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).

- Are incapable of deciding what they want to learn for themselves
- 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:

- Young children 7-8 pay more attention to the sound of the language (musical nature) than word order.
- Acquisition comes primarily through hearing, experiencing and speaking lots of English, much like they acquire their L1 (Cameron, 2001; Slattery & Willis, 2001)
- Learning comes through directed play - at this age they are not capable of organizing their learning. Playing is not done for the conscious purpose of learning; the learning that comes is incidental.
- Language as play. Let the pupils talk amongst themselves. Make up rhymes and songs. They don't 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.
- 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.
- Demonstration is pivotal to teaching students what you want them to learn.
- Learning also comes through a variety of channels: watching, listening, imitating and doing are all viable teaching paths. (Kelly, personal communications; Slattery & Willis, 2001)
- They enjoy routine and repetition - 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 (YLs) in elementary school (aged eight and above), present a more developed set of characteristics in comparison to their younger counterparts:

- Have clear views on the world and clear likes and dislikes
- Can differentiate between fact and fiction
- Are prone to asking questions (outside of school) and should be encouraged to do so (inside the classroom)
- Are capable of making some of their own decisions about what they want to learn
- Have the capacity to work in groups and share with others.
- “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 show 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.]

- 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.)
- 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.
- 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.
- Unlike VYL, YLs can work with others, learn from others and be reliable enough to take responsibility for class activities and routines.
- 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.
- 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.

Alveda 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 learner, have the following advice to offer specifically speaking on Japanese YLs and VYLs.

Japanese children:

- 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.
- Tend to be much less conscious of world affairs than North American counterparts.
- Respond incredibly well to singing and song, and have an aptitude for choral singing well
- Have a surprisingly high capacity for memory and memorization. This feeds into a love of memory games which make excellent activities.
- As a whole, tend to be very obedient to teacher instructions and respect the teacher as an authority figure.
- Typically respond to confrontation with silence.
- Enjoy tongue twisters
- 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 1960's and 1970's, 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 YL and VYL 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:

- 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.
- 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).
- 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.
- Articles like "the" and "a" are often dropped
- The subject or object in a sentence may occasionally be dropped
- There is no distinguishing between singular and plural
- Orally reproducing the "-teen" and "-ty" sounds in numbers is difficult; ex 15 / 50
- Confusion occurs when counting numbers larger than ten thousand
- The sound -si becomes -shi (basic = bashic, similar = shimilar, etc...)
- This pronounced as s, sh, z or d, since Japanese lacks both /T/ and /D/. "Theater" might be pronounced with a /sh/
- Schwa are often misrepresented as short /a/ sounds
- 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 3 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 the ALTs visiting multiple schools, infrequent or intermittent contact (once a month or less) with classes, severely hampers an ALT's attempts to achieve continuity. While the principles of lesson design will not change, it won't 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 issues that should be considered and is by no means exhaustive.

### **Teaching Techniques that Work**

(largely from Cameron, 2001)

#### i) *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.

#### ii) The importance of being interesting - novelty

The novelty of the topics are highly important to students and is reflected in their short attention spans. Typically, 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.

#### iii) The importance of the oral<sup>1</sup>:

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 introduced orally and aurally, and practiced and automatized orally. This is why it is so important that ALT continually speak in English and encourage the practice of English in their young learners (Ys) and very young learners (VYs). Meaning and association comes through repetition and repeated use.

*Singing songs and chanting:* (or if you're 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.

<sup>1</sup> See also Curriculum and Lesson Planning

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 kinaesthetically reinforces multiple memory encoding aspects, like in TPR (Total Physical Response language training).

*Rote phrases<sup>2</sup> 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.

*iv) 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're 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, that Japanese has no future tense).

*Descriptions:* Descriptions are another key feature to language mastery. Describing something involves organizing 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".)

<sup>2</sup> For more information on rote phrases, see Classroom Language: English or Mixed, below

v) *Classroom language: English or mixed?*

Upon entering the JET Programme, ALTs are not expected to know Japanese and 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’re 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’re not speaking slowly enough, you’re not speaking simply enough, you’re not exaggerating enough, you’re not repeating enough, you’re not animated enough, you’re 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, then Hello Kitty (whose first language is obviously Japanese).

vi) *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.

*vi) Don't 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.

*vii) Size does matter - 30+ student classroom*

Remember too, that 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 don't. Children clap only for those that fit) (Krause, 2001).

*viii) 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's 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're using up teaching time. However, you're also physically cuing students into the idea that it's "English Time". This goes back to the idea of routine. The classroom has changed; they too have to change, to speak in English.

*ix) Storytelling*

Many teachers use the powerful technique of storytelling 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)

*x) 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 skill 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/pair that students will work with to minimize 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/VYLs 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 coloring 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 JTL 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 JTL/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.

But 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'll 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***

#### **DON'T**

1. Overestimate what you believe your class can do. Remember, you're 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. Don't 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 JTL/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<sup>3</sup>).

**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 don't know what a personal pronoun is but do enjoy games of communication (Celce-Murcia, 2001).
5. Be holistic in your approach. You don't 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 standardized 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. Don't 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.

3 See Contrastive analysis section for further details.

## Curriculum & Lesson Planning

### **Lost in Translation: What are We Trying to Do? The Ministry of Education Directives on Elementary EFL Education\***

\* This section has been revised by the editors in an effort to bring the content more in line with the current situation. Please refer to pages 76-77 for a copy of the official MEXT outline for Foreign Language Activities, which explains the structure of English education at elementary school, including the most recent policy changes.

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 the *Monbukagakusho's Practical Handbook for Elementary School English Activities* (Ministry of Education, 2001). They advise that the goal of classes are not merely learning the language, but more importantly, involve cultural education and awareness (i.e. promote *kokusaika* or internationalisation). MEXT recommends, "activities like playing games, singing songs, and doing make-believe, that allow students to speak in a naturalistic way" (p. 125). Activities can utilize 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. Various sources (Japan Times, 2007; Tabuchi, 2007) report that Japanese elementary school students receive, on average, about 15 hours of English instruction per year, that is, approximately 15 to 18 lessons per year or seven to nine lessons per term. This figure has increased to approximately 35 hours per year 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. Traditionally, very few of Japan's 416,000 elementary teachers receive any formal training in how to teach English (Monbukagakusho, 1999, p. 150), and most of the teachers are still unsure of how they should proceed. 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. ALTs have observed that "there is often no continuity or consistency to what is being taught" (ALT Opinion Exchange Meeting records, [www.jetprogramme.org](http://www.jetprogramme.org)), and the Ministry has given elementary schools the freedom to come up with their own guidelines (Kelly, 2004) on this matter.

During the 2006-2007 ALT Opinion Exchange Meeting, MEXT stated that it has plans to create a set of teaching resources and materials that will serve as "as a consistent set of standards and guidelines for English instruction in elementary schools in the future." ([www.jetprogramme.org](http://www.jetprogramme.org)) The course of study promulgated in 2011, including the introduction of *Eigo Noto*, a compulsory text made specifically for foreign language activities at upper end of elementary school, has sought to address the situation. However, ALTs still have a large portion of the responsibility for designing EFL activities placed in their hands.

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're beginning and who is accepting responsibility for the curriculum. If you are a first-year ALT, you're 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 (ie: visit a school a few times a year or once every month) 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 prioritize 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 doesn't 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'll probably not be an integral part of their program.

If you are at an elementary school for a longer period of time, JTL (Japanese teacher of English) elementary teachers from the schools 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. As MEXT has no official curriculum or requirements for English in elementary schools, it is something that should be decided by the Board of Education or your local school. Curriculum is a "policy-level" matter; one which you will probably not be involved in. Obviously, as ALTs, you're not going to be handling this. 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 prioritize 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

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 have 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 course provide them?
- How many lessons will you be having with them and how long will it be between lessons?

Overall Course Goal: to teach 9 year old EFL Japanese students to express (count and write <sup>4</sup> ) 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	

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 lesson.

Let's 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 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person (I, you, he/she/it)
- Identification and use of possessive pronouns relating to simple objects

Your lesson plans<sup>5</sup> 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 Taro. Who are you?”  
 2. simple song 2 – “I am Bob. Who is he? He is Ken. Who is she?...”

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

<sup>4</sup> Assuming that students can count to that level in their L1 (Japanese)

<sup>5</sup> Properly detailed lesson plans are covered in more detail below.

in the lesson, scaffolds to the next lesson, supporting the learner along the way.

Of course I would like to emphasize 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, looking at lesson plans as isolated units requested by JTLs/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 do 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 will see will be dramatic.

### Lesson Planning

This is what you execute on a day to day basis. It is a simple piece paper and all the materials that go with it that outline and organize the course of that day's lesson. Plans will outline the all-important routines you will be using in your class as well the order that the material is presented in. After a while you should even develop a sense of how long activities will take and be able to map that onto the lesson plan as well. This should be as detailed as you need it to be. Remember, under ideal conditions you will be team teaching. At this point, your JTL/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're 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're 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 mins)
3. organize class into groups of 4 and hand out animal cards (5 min)
  - letting them color 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, don't 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're 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 coloring in (hint, give them out to each group only after each team has finished 2 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 are available
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/yllsig/>
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.jalt.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) set up a series of guidelines to describe performance in the 4 language skills: those being 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've 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 characterized 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 within 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 recombination 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 personalized, 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 recognize 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 contextualized 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**<sup>6</sup>: 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, standardized 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**<sup>7</sup>

**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 memorized 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.

<sup>6</sup> You may see this in your top level elementary school students, but more likely you will find it in JHS students.

<sup>7</sup> Please recall that writing should not be in your repertoire of taught skills. It is showed here only for comparative purposes.

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## MEXT Foreign Language Activities

### I. OVERALL OBJECTIVE

To form the foundation of pupils' communication abilities through foreign languages while developing the understanding of languages and cultures through various experiences, fostering a positive attitude toward communication, and familiarizing pupils with the sounds and basic expressions of foreign languages.

### II. CONTENT

[Grade 5 and Grade 6]

1. *Instruction should be given on the following items in order to help pupils actively engage in communication in a foreign language:*

1. To experience the joy of communication in the foreign language.
2. To actively listen to and speak in the foreign language.
3. To learn the importance of verbal communication.

2. *Instruction should be given on the following items in order to deepen the experiential understanding of the languages and cultures of Japan and foreign countries:*

1. To become familiar with the sounds and rhythms of the foreign language, to learn its differences from the Japanese language, and to be aware of the interesting aspects of language and its richness.
2. To learn the differences in ways of living, customs and events between Japan and foreign countries and to be aware of various points of view and ways of thinking.
3. To experience communication with people of different cultures and to deepen the understanding of culture.

### III. LESSON PLAN DESIGN AND HANDLING THE CONTENT

1. *In designing the syllabus, consideration should be given to the following:*

1. In principle English should be selected for foreign language activities.
2. Taking into account the circumstances of pupils and the local community, each individual school should establish objectives of foreign language activities for each grade in an appropriate manner and work to realize them over the period of two school years.
3. With respect to the instruction on the content mainly concerning language and culture listed in Subsection II-2, teachers should make them link with the content mainly concerning communication listed in Subsection II-1. In doing so, teachers should try to have pupils understand language and culture experientially, avoiding giving too detailed explanations or engaging pupils in rote learning.
4. The instruction on the content and activities should be in line with pupils' interest. Effort should be made to increase the effectiveness of teaching by, for example, taking advantage of what pupils have learned in other subjects, such as the Japanese language, music and arts and handicrafts.
5. Homeroom teachers or teachers in charge of foreign language activities should make teaching programs and conduct lessons. Effort should be made to get more people involved in lessons by inviting native speakers of the foreign language or by seeking cooperation from local people who are proficient in the foreign language, depending on the circumstances of the local community.
6. When dealing with sounds, teachers should make active use of audio-visual materials such as CDs and DVDs. The audio-visual materials should be selected according to the actual circumstances of the pupils, school and local community.
7. Based on the objectives of moral education listed in Subsections I and II of Chapter 1 "General Provisions" and in Subsection I of Chapter 3 "Moral Education", instruction concerning the content listed in Subsection II of Chapter 3 "Moral Education" should be given appropriately. The instruction should be in accordance with the characteristics of foreign language activities and should be related to the period for moral education.

2. In the handling of the content listed in Subsection II, consideration should be given to the following:

(1) Consideration should be given to the following points when giving instruction over the period of two school years:

- A. When giving pupils opportunities to experience communication in the foreign language, teachers should select appropriate expressions, giving consideration to the developmental stages of the pupils and set communication situations familiar to them.
- B. When giving pupils opportunities to experience communication in the foreign language, teachers should focus on the foreign language sounds and use letters of the alphabet and words as supplementary tools for oral communication, in effort not to give too much burden to pupils.
- C. Since non-verbal communication is also an essential means of communication, teachers should adopt gestures etc. and help pupils understand their functions.
- D. Teachers should enable pupils to deepen their understanding not only of the foreign language and culture, but also of the Japanese language and culture through foreign language activities.
- E. When giving pupils opportunities to experience communication in the foreign language, teachers should mainly set the communication situations and functions listed in the following examples:

[Examples of Communication Situations]

(a) Situations where fixed expressions are often used

- Greeting • Self-introduction • Shopping
- Having meals • Asking and giving directions

etc.

(b) Situations that are likely to occur in pupils' lives

- Home life • Learning and activities at school
- Local events • Childhood play

etc.

[Examples of Functions of Communication]

(a) Improving the relationship with a communication partner

(b) Expressing emotions

(c) Communicating facts

(d) Expressing opinions and intentions

(e) Stimulating a communication partner into action

(2) Consideration should be given to the following points when giving instruction to each grade, taking the learning level of pupils into account:

A. Activities in Grade 5

Considering that pupils learn the foreign language for the first time, teachers should introduce basic expressions about familiar things and events and engage pupils in communication activities where they experience interactions with one another. Teachers should engage pupils mainly in the activities where the pupils may become familiar with the foreign language or in the activities which are related to their daily lives or school lives.

B. Activities in Grade 6

Based on the learning in Grade 5, teachers should engage pupils in communication activities, focused on interactions with one another, including intercultural exchange activities, in addition to activities related to pupils' daily lives or school lives.