

## “ THOUGHTS AND IMPRESSIONS ”

Alison Cooper

Having completed seven months of teaching English in Ashikaga, I am venturing into writing this article on almost any topic having to do with English education in Japan. Since my experience is limited to these past seven months, I thought the best thing to do was to let you know my thoughts and impressions up till now, and a few ideas and for the future.

First of all, I want the JET program to succeed. I feel that having an AET and team-teaching is important and should continue to grow and improve. The students benefit from our visits because they get the opportunity to use their English with a foreigner. This is a rare opportunity due to the limited number of English speaking foreigners in Japan. Many of the other teachers also have a chance to communicate with us which is great for cross-cultural communication and internationalization. This “internationalization” is an important part of my role here on the JET program. At times it seems that the role of internationalization is larger than that of being an Assistant English Teacher, but of course both roles are important. The areas that I feel need some changing and improving to make this program more successful are better communication in general and specifically between the JTE and AET, and much more assistance given to the JTE'S.

Communication is the key to any relationship and it is of course the key for successful team-teaching. Communication is important for the relationship of the JTE and AET together and the relationship of the JTE and AET together with the students. The following are some ideas to achieve better communication:

Small Group Demonstrations, Discussion, and Handouts. Each JTE and AET can bring a language activity that they think is successful and we can try it out, discuss, and revise it if needed. It is easier to communicate in small groups and everyone has the chance and is expected to participate. This small group gathering should have approximately ten participants.

Large Group Gatherings of All JTE's in Ashikaga City. Again, demonstrations,

discussion, and handouts would be the emphasis with certain teachers being responsible to provide an activity and/or demonstration. If the teachers play the role of the students instead of the students themselves, there would be more active involvement by everyone. The AET can transfer some ideas from school to school but there needs to be an overall discussion between the JTE's with or without the AET's presence.

Demonstrations and Handouts on How to Use Your AET. This team-teaching and AET stuff is somewhat of a mystery to all of us so we have to struggle together to make it work. Some teachers are unsure of how to use the AET and I am not exactly sure what I should do. Having demonstrations and handouts would enhance the program and make for better communication between JTE's and AET's. The demonstration could be presented by a video tape of a team-teaching lesson from another city. This would relieve us all from having to prepare a demonstration and would make it easier to comment and criticize without hesitation. A video taped lesson could also be used for the large group gatherings.

As you can see by these brief descriptions, this is only the beginning of some ideas that could be expanded into something useful to benefit the English teachers of Ashikaga. The sharing of ideas in large or small groups can help to build onto what each JTE already has in place. These gatherings can take place in a more relaxed atmosphere that would be conducive to active involvement such as teacher seminars.

More communication and discussion should take place on what the JTE and AET roles are or should be. I feel that the JTE and AET should not stand idle for a long period of time. If we interact throughout the class time with each other and with the students, the students will see that we can communicate well and it will be an enjoyable experience for all. Ultimately it would be motivational for the students to want to speak English. The 'real' teaching of English in all areas of learning a foreign language (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) is up to the JTE ; the meeting with and speaking with a foreigner is up to us ; but a smooth class time and a productive one is up to the both of us.

Knowing the make up of each class is important and the AET cannot know it without the help of the JTE. We should talk about what the needs are of each class as we plan the lesson and activity. The AET only visits a particular class three times at the most so it is important that the students enjoy that time. If the class truly does not enjoy a certain type of activity we can create an activity that they will enjoy. We can make the part they don't enjoy a small part of a bigger activity they do enjoy. Some classes feel more confident and at ease if they recognize the material, so making the lesson review only will help them to enjoy our time together.

A very different thing from what I have been talking about but something that would enhance this program greatly is if the JTE could visit an English speaking country. Directly after college or during college the government or the university itself should encourage and make it easy for future English teachers to live in an English speaking country. Thereafter the opportunity to visit a country for at least one week to a month should be given every three years or so. For teachers already at work for many years the opportunity to visit or to live in an English speaking country should be given. This would help the JTE tremendously with English itself and help the country in general in its' internationalization efforts. Living in or visiting an English speaking foreign country hand in hand with the AET and team-teaching, would make this program holistic. Anyway this is just a thought, but a damn good one,ね!?

The main points that I am stressing for improving this program are communication between JTE's and AET's and more assistance given to the JTE's. More assistance should be given to the JTE's so that this program is accepted easier and understood by all. From good understanding we can have great success for the future of speaking English in Japan.