

Realistically Speaking

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For the last year and a half, I have experienced several aspects of the Japanese school system. Very few people with my background have a chance to be completely immersed into this kind of system. I have thoroughly enjoyed my visits to the schools, both in elementary and junior high. I have been especially impressed with the dedication of the teachers and their willingness to have little or no free time. Sometimes I feel that the teachers have too much responsibility, but their involvement in the students' lives has produced fine citizens that they can be proud of.

Every day I am surprised by a student's smile or his/her effort in English. By being involved in the students' activities, I have learned a lot about myself and English education in Japan. Realistically speaking, I, as an AET, have done little to increase your students understanding of English. But if I have positively encouraged a few students, then I have done my job. There are three areas that are important for furthering English education here in Ashikaga.

Lesson atmosphere, lesson execution, and the future of team-teaching all play an important role in our students' understanding of English.

The lesson atmosphere and the teacher's enthusiasm are the most important aspects of learning a foreign language. If the teacher is enthusiastic and excited about English, so will his/her students. When the AET visits, this is a great time for English to be spoken and enjoyed. When I was studying Spanish, I wish that I had such an opportunity, like the AET's visit, to speak Spanish. Encourage your students to talk to the AET. Don't let the AET's visit be a surprise. Your students should be anxious for the AET's visit and should make an effort to speak with the AET.

Junior high is such an important time for forming impressions. Please help your students to form a positive impression about English. I know that not every student will like English, but when several students in one class tell me that they don't like English, I wonder what was their first impression of English. The teacher can play a major role in their students' feelings toward

English.

As far as lesson execution, the classes that have been the most successful for me were those with various activities. It is important to keep the students' attention. It is helpful if the teachers, JTE and AET, make a sample dialogue and write it on large sheets of paper for the front of the class. This way the students are concentrating on the front board and their pronunciation will be better. Be creative and try new ways to do the new words. Make the words interesting for the students. When studying about Australia, bring in pictures and maps to show to the students. Bring in telephones for students to practice conversation. Anytime you can bring something into the classroom that is visual, the students' interest will automatically pick up. Always ask the AET to help you with this activity. We are more than happy to be involved.

Songs are also a good way to teach English, especially if the students know the tune. It will make for a nice break from your everyday lessons.

Lastly, I feel that the future of team-teaching is an exciting one. In the future, if there are more AETs that visit fewer schools, they will have greater interaction with the schools and the students. With fewer schools to visit, the AET can get to know many of the teachers on a personal level as well as a professional level. I regret that I did not get to know some of you better. The English teachers in Ashikaga have always been open to new ideas and to new teaching theories. Please continue to have an open opinion about English education. Thank you so much for this great experience. This time will always be a special memory for me. Thank you.