

REFLECTIONS ABOUT MY TEACHING EXPERIENCE IN ASHIKAGA

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For the past five months, I have been teaching with you. I have had ample time to think about the AET's role and the team-teaching process. I have, no doubt, discovered pluses and minuses about my job. I feel lucky to have had a chance to teach with many of you. In general, Ashikaga JTEs are extremely receptive to my ideas and eager to improve their English classes. Through trial and error, we have been able to have some successful classes, where students were excited about learning English, willing to try to speak, and able to understand what was spoken to them.

The highlights of my team-teaching experience have been those classes in which I used the language lab at Sanchu. Using the language lab, I read the students short stories and paragraphs, incorporating grammar points that they are studying. The children listen to me read the story once out loud. Then they listen to my voice on tape on their own, using headphones. As they listen on their own, they take notes and are challenged to understand the meaning of the story. After about ten minutes, the JTE and I ask the students questions pertaining to the contents of the story. I have been extremely pleased and surprised at how well the students have been able to understand what was read to them. This exercise, i. e., having the children listen to a short story using headphones, interests the students and, moreover, keeps their attention because they are challenged to figure out the meaning of the spoken dialogue on their own for ten minutes or so.

Receiving such positive feedback from this teaching method, I encourage all of you to try to incorporate some type of language lab into your English classes. Improving the students' listening skills is a critical element in their language study.

Moving on to a touchier subject, one of the main problems I find with the Japanese English education system is that JTEs are not given a chance or are too busy with other school activities to go abroad to an English-speaking country to improve their conversational English skills. I find this extremely unfortunate for not only the teachers but also the students. I strongly believe that if many JTEs were required to and/or able to go live in an English-speaking place for five months to a year, they would be much more confident

in their English skills, especially conversational skills, than they are now. Then they would be more eager and less shy about using English in their classrooms. If JTEs are not confident about their speaking English, then their students will not be either. If JTEs do not think they can speak English very well, then their students will not feel that they can either. Likewise, if JTEs had time to or were given a chance to live in an English-speaking country, they would see the importance and necessity of learning and being able to speak English and also would be exposed to a different culture. They could then expose their students to such experiences and discoveries.

In the United States, if you teach a foreign language, it is quite likely that you have spent an extended amount of time in a country where you have had to use that language and become fluent in that language. In college or after college, foreign language teachers have time to go abroad and fine-tune their language skills. Once they become teachers, during summers and/or during sabbaticals (one or two years in which teachers are not required to teach but instead are involved in extensive study and research), they continue to brush-up and refine their language skills by going abroad.

Firmly believing in what is stated above, I can't help but think that Mombusho's money could be better spent on funding and/or providing JTEs with money and resources to go live abroad for an extended period of time rather than paying for AETs to come to Japan. On a day to day basis, having an AET teach with JTEs may assist some JTEs; however, I think that in the long run, it would be wiser to send the JTEs abroad. Inevitably, it is the JTE who is with the students teaching them English every day of the school year, not the AET. It is the JTE who ultimately affects and helps determine the students' desire to learn English, not the AET, who may only see the same class two or three times throughout his/her year. With this said, I really encourage all of you to go abroad sometime.