

The Future of the AET in Ashikaga

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Today, I am in a rather unique position to write about the role of the AET in English education. Having spent almost two years in Ashikaga, I have had time to examine the role of the AET in English education. It is common knowledge that the Ministry of Education changed the goals of English education in Japan to a more communicative approach. However, it did this without many guidelines as to how to achieve this goal. Therefore, many teachers do not know of practical concrete methods to use in order to bring about this new objective. In Ashikaga, the Board of Education has tried many different approaches concerning the schedule and role of the AET. Although there are not many guide lines as to how to utilize the AET, there are common ideas as to the AET's role. The AET should be used not only as an Assistant English Teacher, but also as a representative of her culture. Also, the AET should be a concrete example of the Ministry of Education's effort to "inter-nationalize" Japan. With these goals in mind, I believe that the system of school visitation in Ashikaga should be changed.

Currently, there are three AET's in Ashikaga. Each AET visits six schools. As there are only eleven Junior High Schools in Ashikaga, the AET's share many schools. It is my belief that this system should be changed. The goals of the JET Program would be better realized if each AET visited three or four schools, and there was no sharing of schools involved. There are many advantages to this program.

The most obvious advantage of this program is that if the AET has less schools to visit, she will spend a longer amount of time at each school. This will translate into more Team-Teaching lessons per class. Therefore, the students will have a greater opportunity to study with the AET. In this way, more actual teaching is accomplished. As the system now stands, where the AET visits a school for only about one week per rotation, it is very difficult to accomplish actual teaching. The time to make lesson plans with teachers is usually hard to find because certain teachers are very busy during this particular week. Also, if some special school event is occurring during this week, such as the Sports-Festivals, or exams, the AET might only teach three classes the whole week.

The new system would also be advantageous in regard to actual teaching. If only one AET visits each school, a greater amount of trust will develop between the AET and the Japanese English Teacher (JTE). The JTE will be able to better understand the teaching style of the AET and, maybe more importantly, the AET will better understand the teaching style of the JTE. This will lead to smoother and better class periods. Also, the JTE might be more willing to ask the AET

for ideas for class, as well as not hesitate to ask the AET to prepare material.

The new system would also better incorporate the AET into the daily life of the school. This would make the AET feel more like a teacher and not a guest. It is very difficult to feel accepted at a school when the AET may only visit a school for one week every two or three months. Also, many schools in Ashikaga have very different schedules. It can be rather difficult to remember the schedule for all the schools that the AET visits (for example lunch time, cleaning time, club activities, and so on). I believe that this also will lead to better English classes.

Another advantage of longer visits is that it gives the AET a better chance to meet and talk with individual students. At each school the AET visits, there are always students that the AET remembers and talks with. But there are many more students whom the AET does not know. There is just not the time to meet and talk with a lot of students as the schedule now stands. If the schools the AET visits are reduced, the AET can become better acquainted with more students, fulfilling on a greater level, I believe, one of the basic goals of the Program, internationalization.

Some teachers might be averse to this program. But if we examine the reasons for this, I believe that the new system would be better for all concerned. Firstly, many teachers say that it is better for two AET's to come to school because it gives the students the chance to meet different AET's and understand different cultures. However, as the system now stands with such short visits, the students can only gain a very superficial understanding of the AET's culture. There is no time for the students to gain a deeper understanding of the AET's culture. Also, with the time so short, many students are unable to talk often with the AET.

Some teachers might also be worried that the AET who would be assigned to their school will not speak American English. This is because most JTE's studied American pronunciation and usage in university. However, it would seem to me that it is more confusing if both an American and non-American AET visit their school. The JTE has to adjust to each AET's pronunciation during the visit, creating needless problems. If only one AET visits each school, the teachers will become used to her pronunciation. Also, the students can better understand that each English speaking country, while similar, are not culturally the same. Therefore, the fear of a non-American AET visiting the school is needless. There might be minor problems in the beginning, but they will be quickly resolved, leading to better and more interesting Team-Teaching lessons.

The current system of AET school visits could be greatly improved, I believe, if the amount of schools each AET visits is reduced. The JET Program, because of a lack of many clear guidelines, is constantly evolving and improving every year. It is my belief that the new system would be a change for the better in English Education in Ashikaga.