

Overcoming Communication Barriers

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Not all junior high school students in Ashikaga are interested in studying English. Why should they be? Studying English is not something they choose to do. It is something they have to do. But, what about the students who are interested in English? What about the students who want to speak English with a native speaker? How can I as an AET give them opportunities to communicate with me?

English Class

The goal of English education in Japan is not to produce English speakers, but English test takers. As a result, communicative teaching is not used in the classroom, so students do not get ample opportunity to speak with the AET. To add to this problem, some JTEs do not facilitate or encourage speaking practice. They do not plan classes with the AET, nor do they include the AET in English lessons. In some instances, their own lack of English skills and speaking confidence are fostered in their students.

Outside of English Class

Since English class does not give students the chance they need to communicate with the AET, they need an alternative. I have personally tried to create situations where they can speak with me. These situations provide students with time to speak English and study culture. Examples of the situations are listed below.

At school

- speaking with students during recess*
- speaking with students after school*
- watching videos of American television shows or movies in the language lab during recess*

At home

- inviting students over to cook "American" food*
- watching movies in English*

Outings

- karaoke*
- bowling*
- shopping*
- going out to eat*

Exchanges

— writing letters

— exchanging tapes with students of our favorite (English) songs

These activities proved to be very productive because students are more comfortable speaking English outside of class. Moreover, since there is no one around to translate for them, they have to speak English.

Problems

Although this idea seems very simple, it is challenging for me. Sometimes, teachers discourage students from speaking with me and try to discourage me from speaking with students. I don't think teachers should force students to speak with the AET; however, I don't think teachers, especially JTEs, should discourage communication. I think I need to make the most of the limited amount of time I spend at my schools. I wish that teachers felt the same way.

Conclusion

I hope JTEs will work with AETs to make English class more conducive to communication. This sentiment has been echoed by AETs for years, in this very journal in fact, and ignored. Therefore, until some changes in English education occur, I hope that teachers will be open-minded and allow the AET to communicate with students who are interested in English.