

Two Can Play At That Game:  
Thoughts On Team-Teaching English

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I would like to take this opportunity to talk a little bit about issues of communication between Japanese English Teachers (JTEs) and Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), adding a few words at the end about team-teaching in general. First of aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaasaa. Sorry about that; there was something stuck to my 'a' key. First of all, I would like to applaud all the JTEs and ALTs for their team-teaching efforts: I think that the students of Ashikaga have benefited from it. Secondly, I would like to offer a few tips that I think would help streamline communication between JTEs and ALTs.

Team-teaching is a very fluid process. With JTEs rotating from school to school and new ALTs coming and going every year, everyone must learn to adapt to working with new people quickly and effectively. I think that the teaching process would benefit greatly if, after a new ALT enters a school or the JTEs rotate schools, a short meeting was scheduled where the ALT could talk with each JTE individually about classroom issues and work out how that team-teaching partnership should work. Even if it's just five minutes long, such a meeting lets the ALT know what they are expected to do and lets the JTEs know that the ALT understands what is expected of them. By addressing these issues right away – issues such as 1) 'What should the ALT's role in the average lesson be?', 2) 'What preparation work should the ALT do before classes?', and 3) 'How should discipline be handled in the classroom?' – both the JTE and the ALT can walk into their first lesson prepared.

I would know, for example, that the team-teaching partnership is a 70%-30% partnership, with the JTE taking the lead and me offering support. And that if I tell a couple disruptive students to quiet down, I can count on the teacher to support me and tell the students to behave if they ignore me. And I would know that I should create worksheet ideas, games, and conversation drills for lessons but won't often need to develop an entire lesson plan myself.

This is just an example, of course; a very different set of ground rules could work equally well. My point though, for both the ALT and the JTE, is that *discussing* the ground rules is just as important as having them – it lets both of you work more efficiently right from the start. So whoever you are, whether ALT or JTE, please consider talking with your team-teaching partner for just a few minutes about these issues during that crucial first week.

In closing, I'd like to suggest that small doses of humor can be great for getting students' attention (and/or waking them up). Even if they don't quite 'get' the humor, they might think "Whoa, what's going on?" or "What's s/he going to do next?" which gets their attention on you and what you're saying, even if it's just for a few minutes. But hey, every minute counts.