

Team Teaching in Perspective

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Since 1987, when the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program started, the number of native speaker assistant English teachers (AETs)¹ working in Japanese junior and senior high schools has increased at a rate of around 500 per year, with the present total standing at around 4,000. Apparently, "anecdotal evidence suggests that the Program generally has been welcomed by language educators" (Wada & Cominos, 1994, p. 1), though a similar kind of "evidence" might be adduced (e.g. from letters appearing regularly in *The Daily Yomiuri*; Voci-Reed, 1994) to show that many AETs continue to be frustrated by their working conditions, and by a perceived lack of understanding at the grass roots level of the overall Program goals—to "improve foreign language education" and "enhance internationalization" (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 1994, p. 6). At the same time, concern has been expressed recently about the possibility that "team teaching" between AETs and Japanese teachers of English (JTEs)² may have become over-routinized (Niisato, 1992; Smith, 1994b; Wada, 1994), although—here, too—explicit empirical evidence is thin.

Unfortunately, overall research-based evaluation of the kind which might lead to objective clarification of the Program's strengths and weaknesses has either not been carried out or not been publicised by the government ministries concerned. As a result, public debate has tended to be somewhat circular, rarely being based on anything other than opinion or anecdotal "evidence." The recent publication of a collection of research-based and/or analytical articles (Wada & Cominos, 1994) does, however, represent an encouraging step out of the circle of subjective assertion and counter-assertion, and, in this developing context, the participants in the colloquium reported on here were given a brief to further raise the level of debate regarding the Program by placing it "in perspective" through an attitude of impartial (though not necessarily research-based) analysis, and with a view to suggesting solutions and possibilities beyond those which are usually proposed.

In this connection, the first speaker John Fanselow of Teachers College, Columbia University presented a number of potentially therapeutic insights. Taking full account of the frustrations many AETs seem to face, he indicated ways in which they might transcend such frustrations by adopting fresh perspectives on their work. Emphasizing the cross-cultural nature of the experience of cooperation between AETs and JTEs, he suggested that participation in the JET Program represents a valuable opportunity for personal enrichment, if AETs are prepared to observe and listen carefully,

reserve judgment, and thereby develop tolerance and understanding. Via numerous parables, Fanselow showed that while the tendency to evaluate according to preexisting schemata is a normal and human one, judgments made in this way are liable to fall particularly wide of the mark in cross-cultural contexts. When in the Peace Corps in Nigeria, for example, Fanselow's initial reaction on finding light switches consistently "upside down" was that this situation stood in self-evident need of rectification. In contexts such as the JET Program where, even if officially termed "assistants," visitors are assumed and often assume themselves to be agents of change, a degree of arrogance, not to say cultural imperialism (Holliday 1994; Phillipson 1992), is likely to interfere with the listening and observing process recommended by Fanselow. However, if they do not make the effort to stand back, suspend judgment, and understand local conditions, AETs are in danger of "pursuing a mirage," wasting their talents and energies, and becoming mired in the frustration of not being listened to, since—whatever the AET's initial understanding of his or her work here—it is almost inevitable that JTEs and other local staff will have different preconceptions from those of the AET.

While Fanselow provided a fresh perspective on the JET Program by reconceptualising it as a process of ongoing personal, and by implication professional development, Graham Law of Waseda University, the next presenter, offered a timely deconstruction of the central JET Program notion of "team teaching." As Law remarked, although alternative suggestions have been made in the past for ways in which AETs and JTEs could collaborate for the attainment of JET Program goals (LoCastro & Taniguchi, 1987; Smith, 1988), one particular and rather narrow conception of "team teaching" has held sway and, remarkably, remained largely unchallenged since the inception of the Program. To clarify matters here, although very little official guidance appears to have been given in the past to either AETs or JTEs regarding how they should work together, the idea has taken hold that the AET's role is primarily to help in the planning and teaching of "communicative" lessons where both AET and JTE are present simultaneously in the same classroom. Minoru Wada, a former English curriculum specialist at the Ministry of Education, has perhaps been most instrumental through numerous publications (e.g., Wada, 1987; Brumby & Wada, 1990) in ensuring widespread acceptance of this particular conception of the AET's work. This is a conception which, indeed, has recently been given a degree of official sanction by the publication of the Ministry of Education's *Handbook for*

Team-Teaching (1994), where the type of team teaching "focused on" (ibid.:14)—although not explicitly "recommended"—does not differ significantly from the model proposed by Wada.

Law's presentation centred on the proposal that the term "co-teaching" should be used for this relatively narrow model of cooperation, while the term "team teaching" should be freed to include the much wider possibilities of pairs and larger groups of teachers working together on a common program in joint planning, joint consultation, joint materials production, joint program administration, and joint testing. In this wider and—outside Japan—more widely accepted conception of team teaching, joint classroom teaching is just one aspect of the cooperation which might be expected between teachers, while joint teaching will not necessarily involve co-teaching (alternative possibilities for the JET Program might include, for example, the AET teaching a class "solo" on the basis of joint planning with the JTE or AET and JTE planning together, then teaching different halves of the class simultaneously in different rooms as is common in the context of European assistant language teacher programs). Japanese secondary school examples of team teaching in this wider sense include the British Council/Koto-ku project (Sturman, 1989), where cooperation between native speaker teachers and JTEs has extended in the past to production of a course of reusable lesson plans and initiatives at certain private high schools (cf. the compendium of materials put together by a team of teachers at Tokiwamatsu Gakuen in Tokyo, 1991. While productive cooperation between JTEs and AETs beyond the planning and co-teaching of one-off lessons probably does occur on the JET Program, Law noted that this is unlikely unless the AET is based in a school rather than a local authority office. It might also be suggested that so long as co-teaching remains the primary focus of work on the JET Program (as is implied by the Ministry of Education *Handbook for Team-Teaching*), other forms of cooperation will tend to depend largely on individual initiative and be somewhat piecemeal, not being part of the Program design.

On the basis of extensive consideration of the relative merits of co-teaching and a wider conception of team teaching in the JET Program context, Law concluded that while co-teaching has certain "primary level" advantages it might in some circumstances overly restrict teachers, and should in any case be seen as a point of departure rather than an end point for cooperation between AETs and JTEs. Thus, while co-teaching might serve a useful purpose as a "training ground" for inexperienced AETs and/or JTEs lacking confidence in their ability to teach "communicatively," when AETs and JTEs do possess a certain basic expertise in communicative language teaching, jointly planned split class or solo AET teaching combined with consultation at a higher

level (e.g., in joint course design, materials production, testing, etc.) would appear to offer greater flexibility for continuing teacher development. Indeed, this kind of arrangement would provide one answer to the concern expressed above that (in the words of Masao Niisato of the Ministry of Education) a "plateau" may tend to be reached with co-teaching: "[Japanese teachers] now feel very comfortable with the distance they have [gone] with their ALTs. They stop going further" (Niisato, 1992).

Another of Law's arguments was related to the in-built "stress factor" in co-teaching, which he characterised as a kind of theatre whose success or failure depends largely on the personal chemistry between AET and JTE. In this connection, John Fanselow had earlier implied that neither co-teaching itself nor the joint planning or evaluation of co-teaching may be the ideal forum for genuine "listening and learning" to occur between AETs and JTEs, precisely because co-teaching brings the requirements of public "face" so much to the fore. Law concurred with Fanselow, then, in suggesting that development of alternative, less public and stressful settings for sharing of ideas between AETs and JTEs might result in a greater degree of genuine "listening and learning," since professional rather than personal concerns would then be much more central.

Law made several other arguments in favour of moving beyond co-teaching and towards a wider conception of team teaching which might be more appropriate when "primary level" JET Program goals (e.g., basic AET and JTE understanding of "communicative" teaching procedures) have been reached. One such argument was related to the fact that co-teaching might tend to be less efficient than, for example, solo AET and JTE teaching of split halves of the class in terms of amount of student-teacher interaction, and also in terms of production of reusable supplementary teaching materials (there seems to be a current tendency on the JET Program for these to be produced solely with one-off co-taught lessons in mind, and without regard to their potential use in ongoing solo teaching by [groups of] JTEs). This latter point is related to Law's final major argument. He said that while the JET Program probably has had a useful primary effect in introducing many JTEs to the potential of using more English in the classroom and engaging students in "communicative" speaking and listening activities when the AET is present, there is currently little guarantee or evidence that co-teaching contributes to innovation where it really matters—in "normal" English lessons taught by the JTE. Conversely, there may be a strong tendency for both JTEs and students to consider co-taught oral/aural lessons as an entertaining diversion from the more "serious business" of JTE lessons, which are likely to remain unaffected unless AETs are involved more widely, and at a deeper level of cooperation than in the co-teaching of one-off lessons.

Law noted that the current JET Program emphasis on co-teaching of oral/aural skills—and general absence of other types of cooperation which might entail greater AET involvement in students' overall learning of English—is consistent with a "territorial imperative" observable in all areas of English language education in Japan since the Meiji era, namely the hiving off of "Eikaiwa" (practical "English Conversation"), seen as best-taught by a native speaker teacher, from "Eigo" ("English"), a more "weighty" subject traditionally involving the study of grammar and decoding of written texts, seen as the preserve of Japanese teachers. As Holliday (1994, pp. 80-86) makes clear, similar divisions may constitute a barrier to educational innovation in societies outside Japan. What also becomes apparent, though, is that without some attempt on both sides of the JTE-AET equation to cede territory—or, more positively, "give" ground—communicative reform of the teaching by JTEs of their "own" subject, "Eigo," will not necessarily occur as a result of co-teaching with AETs of "their" subject, "Eikaiwa."

While Law suggested instituting types of team work additional to co-teaching as one means of integrating and so enhancing the AET's contribution to overall curriculum renewal, Sheila Hones, the final presenter, went one stage further in proposing, on the basis of observations relating to a team teaching program at her own institution, Keisen Jogakuen University, that communicative reform of the teaching of core subject "Eigo" might be further encouraged through a revised conception of appropriate "territory" for AET-JTE cooperation. The perspective provided by Hones lay in the suggestion that team teaching territory might be extended to the teaching of reading skills, hitherto considered part of the JTE's but not the AET's preserve (however, see Jannuzi (1994) for supporting arguments in favour of the team teaching of reading; also, lesson plans in the Ministry of Education's *Handbook for Team-Teaching* (1994) appear to lend weight to a readjustment of priorities from an exclusive focus on oral/aural skills in co-teaching).

As Hones noted, and as is reflected in the revised course of study for lower and upper secondary school English (contained as an appendix in the *Handbook for Team-teaching*, cited above), insights derived from the "Communicative Approach" are by no means applicable only to the teaching of oral/aural skills. She also emphasised that "communicative" team teaching of reading might be expected to be of particular usefulness when—as in Japan—"core" teaching and, importantly, testing of English is so deeply rooted in the study of written text. However, Hones referred back to Fanselow's arguments in laying special emphasis on the need for native speaker teachers to be sensitive to the different assumptions both JTEs and students are likely to have about English reading and the teaching of reading in Japan. Thus, whereas a made-for-export "communi-

cative" model of the teaching of reading might involve the development of skills such as inferencing, skimming, and scanning with an emphasis on extensive reading and the active construction of meaning from text, the concept of "reading as translating" is likely to be a more common paradigm among JTEs and students. Here, the teacher's central role is to provide a model translation and use the text as a springboard for grammar and vocabulary development with the result that the type of reading engaged in is likely to be intensive rather than extensive, and form- rather than meaning-focused.

In the absence of mutual sensitivity, the latter model might be attacked for "not involving reading" (i.e., development of reading "skills"), while JTEs and students might see the communicative paradigm as "not involving teaching!" Thus, even when we use the same words ("reading," "teaching," etc), these may cover different, equally valid conceptual realities; also, as Hones emphasised, students may have differing expectations of Japanese and non-Japanese teachers with the result that what is possible for native speaker teachers may not immediately appear so to JTEs; for example, whereas students might expect JTEs to explain everything in a reading text, native speaker teachers might be either unaware of or exempted from this expectation with the result that they can engage students more easily in extensive reading activities.

Evidently, so long as positions remain entrenched with regard to the teaching of reading in Japan, genuine improvement and cooperation in this area is unlikely to occur. Hones agreed with both Fanselow and Law in suggesting that, in order for the necessary understanding and respect to develop, short-term co-teaching may be insufficient. Instead, negotiation of a common program over the long term, joint materials development, joint testing, and—where relevant—joint analysis of entrance examinations may provide more relaxed arenas for mutual professional development.

In conclusion, all three presenters responded in varying but mutually consistent ways to the challenge of placing "team teaching in perspective." In a sense, the necessity of both sides "giving more ground" if team teaching is to have a long-lasting, as opposed to cosmetic influence on English education in Japan, became the predominant theme of the colloquium, with Fanselow emphasizing the importance, in particular for AETs, of "listening and learning" as a prelude to appropriate action; Law providing a convincing demonstration of the need for JTEs and Program administrators to "open up" to the possibilities of involving AETs in deeper forms of cooperation than co-teaching; and Hones building on the arguments of both Fanselow and Law to show how team teaching might be introduced into the relatively uncharted territory of reading instruction.

TEAM, cont'd on p. 58.

Recommendations

—At the display table, I received a lot of inquiries about JALT. For next year, I recommend we once more have an attractive display and make ourselves visible. We should supply information about the next two national conferences. It seems like people need almost a year to plan a trip to Japan to attend our conference.

—Before leaving Japan, the representative should contact the N-SIGs and ask them if they have any special needs. This year, Richard Smith, Joint Coordinator of Learner Development N-SIG, asked me to hand his newsletters to his IATEFL counterpart. As IATEFL had expressed a desire to create a Global Issues N-SIG, Neil Hargreaves brought newsletters from our Global Issues N-Sig and attended their meeting.

—I recommend we invite an IATEFL National Officer to speak at our conference. Donald Freeman, Past President of TESOL, was our plenary speaker in Matsuyama this year.

—I recommend we invite Andrew Wright, teacher and storyteller, who is a regular speaker at IATEFL, to our international conference.

—The JALT representative should meet with the IATEFL Executive Officer to touch base and to keep good relations between our associations.

JALT is a dynamic language teaching association just like IATEFL and TESOL. At IATEFL, the JALT representative has a chance to meet teachers from several countries and to talk about our context, our publications, our meetings, and our conferences. I learned much about the teaching and organizational challenges that confront teachers in other countries. I hope they in turn benefited from the JALT display and the talks we had about our respective associations and contexts.

The 1995 IATEFL Conference will be at the University of York from April 9 to April 12, 1995. You can become an IATEFL member through JALT. Apply at JALT Central Office using the furikae postal form in the back of this *TLT*.



TEAM, cont'd from p. 52.

Discussion following the presentations centred on administrative reforms which might enhance the continuing development of team teaching on the JET Program. Those present agreed—in line with the arguments previously presented—that it would be desirable to expand opportunities for solo teaching by AETs on the basis of joint consultation with JTEs, increase placement of AETs in base schools as opposed to local authority offices, and extend the contractual limitation on JET Program employment beyond the current three years (this latter proposal being related to Fanselow's emphasis on the inevitability and desirability of prolonged AET "culture shock" as a prelude to appropriate action). Implementation of such measures, in tandem with careful consideration of the arguments presented by the three colloquium speakers, would surely go a long way towards ensuring the continued development of the JET Program as a dynamic force for innovation in the Japanese English language education context.

Notes

1. The focus of this report is on the teaching of English in Japan, and the term "assistant English teacher" (AET) is therefore preferred to "assistant language teacher" (ALT), recently introduced as a consequence of the employment of small numbers of assistants in the teaching of languages other than English on the JET Program.
2. For the reason given in note 1, JTE is preferred to the more recent designation, JTFL (Japanese teacher of a foreign language).

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