

Two JTEs and one ALT in a small school

~ cooperation ~

Preface

My name is Lena LeRay, and I am a JET Program Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) in Japan. The town I live and work in is a small, rural town which is getting smaller every year. I recently found a thick workshop handout in my desk, written who knows how many years ago by a Japanese Teacher of English (JTE; a native Japanese person who teaches English in Japan) who used to work at the high school (now closed due to lack of enrollment) in my town. In skimming over it to determine if it was trash, I realized that the information in it could be of value to both ALTs like myself and JTEs in Japan.

I have retyped it here, changing names for privacy reasons and excluding only some sample lesson plans at the back and a Japanese paragraph on the first page which introduced the original writer to Japanese members of his audience. All information in that Japanese paragraph is expressed elsewhere in the handout in English. Some changes have been made to formatting for clarity, such as bolding headers in tables.

Since the original was written by a Japanese person, the English is not always perfect. I have made no attempts to fix errors other than obvious typos such as an uncapitalized letter, since the writer's meaning is clearly transmitted as-is.

Random side note: by the time I arrived, there was only one JTE at the school. Since the school was already on its way to closing, there were no 1st years, 11 2nd years, and 9 3rd years. When a Japanese school closes, they stop admitting new students but allow the current ones to finish graduating from the school as normal.

Some of the other information is a little outdated, too, but overall I think this document can be of help to ALTs and JTEs in small towns in Japan.

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Ichiro Tanaka

Nakagawa Commercial High School

Our school, Nakagawa Commercial High School, is a very small school in a rural area. We have a number of problems like many other small schools, but we are lucky because we have two JTEs in spite of the small size of ours and we are also able to invite the ALT hired by Nakagawa town. Since we started the two JTEs system, we have been thinking about how best to make use of these merits and trying several activities, which would not have been able to without our cooperation.

In this report I divide our activities into two groups. One is the activities that aim to encourage students and the other is the activities that aim to encourage us. The former is often thought of when we think of English education, but the latter is sometimes paid little attention. Both of these are very important.

In this conference I would like to share our experiences with you and hope that our small step is of a little help at your schools.

The contents of this report are:

1. About our School
2. Activities to encourage students to study English
 - (a) Effective class for T-T [team-teaching] with JTE for our students
 - (b) Effective method for T-T with JTE
 - (c) JTEs' meeting
 - (d) Effective method for T-T with ALT
 - (e) Other activities (licensing test, speech contest)
3. Activities to encourage teachers to have better English classes
 - (a) Study Meeting with ALT
 - (b) Open class with JTE in the junior high in our town
 - (c) JTEs' meeting in English
 - (d) English class for elementary pupils
 - (e) Japanese lesson for ALT
4. Conclusion

Cooperation

Nakagawa Commercial High School

Ichiro Tanaka

1) About Our School

Our town, Nakagawa, is situated between Wakkanai and Nayoro. It takes about 90 minutes by car to go to each town. Because of this geographical condition our school doesn't have any students who come from the cities. Unlike some local high schools with their dormitories, we don't have any students who come from big cities like Sapporo and Asahikawa. As Table 1 shows, most of the students come from our town and the towns next to ours, like Horonobe and Teshio.

The population in our town is decreasing year by year. During the time I have lived in Nakagawa 6 years, about 40-50 people have left the town each year. Therefore our school has a small number of students. Last year 18 students graduated from the junior high school here, only 6 of whom came to our school.

Because of the small number of students, the character of each grade is greatly influenced by each student. For example, in our school the atmosphere in the third grade is very calm, but the first grade is very noisy. We must think of a good applicable method for each grade. We cannot use the same method for next year's students.

Small schools like ours usually have at most one English teacher, but we have two. As Table 2 shows, we have many students who want to go into upper schools. In order to encourage students to study English, one more English teacher was added to our school 6 years ago. Since then we have been thinking how best to take advantage of two JTEs in our school.

Table 1 – Junior high schools which our students graduated from. (2002 school year)

Town	1st grade	2nd grade	3rd grade	Total
Nakagawa	6	16	8	30
Horonobe	7	3	4	14
Teshio	0	3	0	3
Others	0	0	1	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>48</i>

Table 2 – graduates' courses (2001 school year)

University (4 years)	College (2 years)	Technical college	Job	Total
7	3	5	8	23

2) Activities to encourage students to study English

(a) Effective class for T-T with JTE for our students

Because of the small number of applicants for our school, any student can enter it even though they may get almost 0 percent in their entrance exams. We actually have some students who cannot understand the alphabet along with the students who achieved more than 60 percent in their entrance exams. We have to find a good method to teach them together. When I came here 6 years ago, we divided the class according to students' academic levels. This method is often used in T-T. There are some good aspects to this method, such as:

1. We can teach them according to their levels.
2. We can control the class more easily because of the small number of students.

But we came to realize the negative to this method.

1. Even though we divide the students, we find level differences among one group. For example, we had extremely low level students. Even in the class such students could not follow what was happening.
2. Less motivated students cannot be stimulated by the academically high level students.
3. We invite an ALT once a week. We think it very useful to teach international understanding. The students experience a lot that they wouldn't without meeting an ALT. For example, Horonobe town doesn't have an ALT. The students there have little experience of being taught by an ALT. Compared with students from Nakagawa who got used to being taught by an ALT during their junior high days, Horonobe students seemed to be nervous at first. If we divide the class, it is difficult to invite the ALT to both groups every week.

Thinking of both good and bad aspects, we decided not to divide the class. In order to use the

good aspects we use some time to have the students work themselves during the class, so that two JTEs can approach each student.

After we had T-T in the same class, we found some benefits:

1. We can use English between JTEs in a short dialoge activity in our classroom like “Please read the story”, “Would you bring the dictionary from the teachers' room” and so on. These conversations are good for students to increase their listening ability and encourage them to use English in the classroom.
2. We can use each teacher's talent in a class. Last year a teacher whom I worked with could play the guitar well. We had a music corner at the end of the classes in which we enjoyed singing som English songs.
3. Some students cannot perform basic classroom tasks like sitting still, taking notes, and listening to us. At the beginning of the classes we always instruct them to wear their uniform properly and take off their piercings and rings. Sometimes some of them get angry at us. On these occasions we can use the advantage of two teachers in the classroom. For example, when on teacher scold students, the classroom tends to be filled with bad atmosphere. In that situation, we cannot do activities like a game. But the other teacher can change the bad atmosphere with ease. In one class each teacher can do his/her roles depending on his/her abilities, which is very useful especially for a noisy class.
4. These days we can hear a lot about ADHA and LD. For the last two years we have had a few students who seemed to be ADHD or LD in our school. They cannot sit still let alone take notes and listen to the teacher. Sometimes they are out of control. It is good to use the advantage of two teachers in the classroom. One teacher can take the student to another room until he/she calms down.

(b) Effective method for T-T with JTE

When we started T-T, we decided to have an effective T-T. An ordinary method for T-T, which we chose, is to have a main teacher and a sub teacher. But we decided that both of us should be main teachers because if one of us takes a sub position, the other tends to feel less responsibility.

Easy to say but difficult to do. We came across a lot of problems. For example, when a student cause a trouble in a class, we must judge and guide the student on the spot. We have no time for discussion and the way we guide is different from person to person. We need a person to decide what

we should do for the trouble. Even though we have a lesson plan beforehand, we sometimes have to change it according to the students' condition. Who judges it? As an old proverb says, “Too many cooks spoil the broth”, we came to realize why many teachers take the main-sub method. After several trials we gave up pursuing our method. We decided to take the main-sub method as Table 3. But each of us took both main and sub position, so that we could understand the other position and encourage each other to improve our classes.

Even after we changed to this method we had a lot of problems. For example, when we thought about the teaching plan, we noticed that each teacher has a different view for English education. We thought of importance of discussion. We tried to have a regular meeting to talk about our method, about what we noticed in our classes and so on.

Table 3 0 English Subjects we teach (2001 school year)

Subjects	Grade	The number of students	Credits	Isao Nakamura	Ichiro Tanaka
English I	1	22	4	○	◎
English II	2	13	4	◎	○
Oral A	3	23	2	○	◎
Reading	3 (optional)	14	2	-	◎
Writing	3 (optional)	4	3	◎	-

◎ chief teacher ○ sub teacher

(c) JTEs' meeting

One of the purposes of English education is international understanding. I would say that for teachers who teach it, interpersonal understanding is a prerequisite. In order to achieve this goal we must have time and an atmosphere to talk about what we are thinking, planning and envisioning for our classes. When we think of teaching methods, we tend to be influenced by our educational or experimental backgrounds. I used to work at an academic school, and my co-worker at an academically low level school. Whenever we talked about a method, we came across the different views much influenced by our experiences. When we did not have time to talk, misunderstanding occurred and it became big problem. If we expect good T-T classes, we need the meetings where we can share our ideas. We now try to have one meeting a week even though both of us are busy.

(d) Effective method for T-T with ALT

Our town has an ALT. Even though our school is run by the Hokkaido government, we have a benefit of being able to invite the ALT in our town to our school once a week. When we invite the ALT to have T-T, we need a time to talk about it like T-T between JTEs. We always have discussion time before the lessons and reflection time after the lessons (Table 4). In the discussion time we talk about the lesson plans and other topics like the ALT's culture, which is good for our future lessons. And in the reflection time we always talk about what we did in the classes to have better classes next week. As between JTEs we have a lot of misunderstanding between the ALT and the JTE. We should tell the ALT what we want them to do in the classes and listen to what they want us to do.

Last August a new ALT came to Nakagawa. She comes to our school once a week. She is new and is not familiar with Japanese school system. We are the very people to tell her about it. For example, in our school we always ask students to take off their piercings before class. Most new ALTs don't have this kind of information. If we seek better T-Ts, we should have both discussion and reflection time to exchange our information and ideas.

Table 4 – Time Table when we invite ALT

Period	ALT (Lisa Madden)	JTE (Tanaka)	JTE (Nakamura)
1	Discussion with Tanaka	Discussion	
2	Discussion with Nakamura		Discussion
3	2 nd grade class with Nakamura		2 nd grade class
lunch			
4	Sudy meeting	Study meeting	Study meeting
5	1 st grade class with Tanaka	1 st grade class	
6	Reflection	Reflection	Reflection

Our school is a Hokkaido prefectural high school. We can also invite an ALT stationed at the board of education in Asahikawa. We always make use of this opportunity. We invite this ALT twice a year to get some stimulation and information from them. We usually have two T-T classes, with the other JTE and ALT observing. After the classes we have a conference in English, in which we talk about what we noticed while observing the classes and exchange our opinions (Table 5). We receive some information about other schools from the ALT from Asahikawa because they visit many schools in this district. Especially when one ALT is new it is good for them to get a lot of information based on

an elder ALT's experiences.

This year we invited an ALT with “shidou shuji”, his supervisor, at the board of education in Asahikawa and had open classes and a conference all in English. This was a very good time both for JTEs and ALTs because the supervisor gave us a lot of good suggestions and information.

Table 5 – Time Table for when we invite ALT in Asahikawa and ALT in our town

Period	ALT (in Asahikawa)	JTE (Tanaka)	ALT (in Nakagawa)	JTE (Nakamura)
1	Discussion with Tanaka	Discussion with ALT (Asahikawa)	Discussion with Nakamura	Discussion with ALT (Nakagawa)
2	1 st grade class		Observation	
3	Observation		2 nd grade class	
Lunch				
4	Conference (for 1 st grade)			
5	Conference (for 2 nd grade)			
6				

(e) Other activities

i. Licencing Test

Since our school is a commercial high school, our students have one more opportunity to take licensing tests, All Commercial High School English Test as well as three STEP tests in a year. Because of a small size of our school, the number of the students who take the tests is also very small (Table 6). Sometimes we have only one student for a STEP test. On this occasion we have to pay the corresponding charge ourselves. We always have a number of students for the All Commercial High School English Test and we can get some money from our supervisory service. We pool it for the corresponding charge for the STEP tests.

We share the responsibility of the three STEP tests with a junior high school English teacher in this town. This year we have two tests in our school and one in the junior high school. We think it is good for students to be motivated to study English by them. When the test day approaches, we usually have extra classes for the tests after school. Some students attend to study hard.

Table 6 – the number of students who took licensing tests (2002 school year)

	1 st	2 nd	Pre 2 nd	3 rd	4 th
STEP (Jun.)			1 (0)		
ACH (Sep.)		9 (7)		5 (2)	
STEP (Sep.)			1 (0)		
STEP (Jan.)					

Bracketed is the number of students who passed the tests.

ii. Speech contest

We have two speech contests during the year. One is held by all Hokkaido Senior High School Speech Contest and the other is a speech contest for All Commercial High Schools. The latter is always held in Sapporo. Our school is very small and doesn't have enough money to send students to a distant place. We always attend the former contest because it is held in Asahikawa near our town. But we don't have enough money to send students away including a night hotel charge. We always ask the school in charge of the contest to put our student in the afternoon order. With the help of the school we can attend the contest (Table 7).

It is said that it takes a lot of time to train a student for the contest and that if we have such time, we would like to use it for more students. In a sense it is true, but we want to use this opportunity to encourage our students to be interested in learning English. We can share the responsibility with the ALT in this town because she is also interested in training the student.

When the contest approaches we have rehearsals in our English classes and after school we ask our colleagues to listen to students' speeches so that they get used to making speeches in front of crowds. And for the students in a small school, it is precious experience to join a big event with many students from many other schools. When we get a prize, students in this rural school have confidence to achieve something among big schools in urban areas.

Table 7 – The names and the titles of speech contest

School year	Name	Grade	Title
2000	Michiko Watanabe	3	A Lifelong Friendship
2001	Yuichi Yoshino	2	Bullying
2002	Junki Ueno	1	Voyage

3) Activities to encourage teachers to have better classes

(a) Study Meeting with ALT

We have a study meeting with the ALT when she comes to our school once a week. At first we used a text book like ESL, which took some time to prepare for the meeting. These days we use interesting topics of our own creation. We decide the person to prepare for a topic and talk about it for 50 minutes in English. It is very useful to understand each others' way of thinking and practice English (Table 8).

Teachers have many tasks in school besides teaching English and can hardly find time to have such meetings. But once we set apart a period for the meeting, we try to find a time. This time is very good because it brings an academic atmosphere among us, which is good for us who are often busy guiding less motivated students. In urban areas I hear that English teachers go to conversation school to brush up their English with their own money. We don't have to. Through the study meeting we can brush up our English as well as our way of thinking.

Table 8 – Study Meeting

Date	Person in charge	Contents
10/1	JTE Nakamura	About Education “Why are today's students sensitive to their profit?”
10/8	ALT Lisa Madden	Poem (This is Just to Say) by William Carlos Williams
10/22	JTE Tanaka	Bible story Martha and Mary

(b) Open class with a JTE in the junior high in our town

Our town has one junior high school with one JTE, which means there are three JTEs in our town. Compulsory schools have “han kenshu”, group study meetings, in which teachers can belong to their favorite groups to study together. Even though we are high school teachers, we belong to the meeting. *[Lena's note: education is compulsory through the end of junior high school in Japan.]*

In the English group meetings three JTEs in this town usually have three open classes and conferences after the classes in a year (Table 9). In the open classes we can learn how to have better classes, and in the conferences we exchange information each other and can get a lot of good information about junior high school students. This is very useful because many of them will be our

students in a few years. In order to have open classes we have to prepare for them, which is good for us to reflect what we are doing now and gives us stimulation to have better classes.

In a rural area like ours we need such incentives because we have less opportunities to be stimulated than teachers in urban areas. Especially if the teachers are new and lack experience, this kind of cooperation is one of the most effective and useful methods.

Table 9 – Open Classes

Date	Teacher(s)	Class
7/15	Yuri Iida	Nakagawa Junior High School 1 st grade
8/22	Ichiro Tanaka Isao Nakamura	Nakagawa Commercial High School 1 st grade (T-T)
11/14	Ichiro Tanaka Michael Spitz (ALT in Asahikawa)	Nakagawa Commercial High School 1 st grade (T-T)
	Isao Nakamura Lisa Madden (ALT in Nakagawa)	Nakagawa Commercial High School 1 st grade (T-T)

(c) JTEs' meeting in English

We have two English teachers in spite of our school's small size. As I mentioned before, when we work together we should talk a lot to share our ideas and visions. By sharing them we can produce new activities. Many activities we are doing were hit on during these meetings. We try to have one English teachers' meeting a week even though both of us are busy doing other school work.

From last spring on we have had them in English. We are English teachers. We need to brush up our English. But, sad to say, we can hardly find time to polish our English. I think English teachers' meeting is the best chance to achieve the goal because both of us are curious to study English. When we invite an ALT, it is easier to use English, but among JTEs it is very hard. Why? We don't get used to using it among the Japanese. As English teachers, we always ask our students to use English as often as possible. If we don't follow our own advice, it is nonsense to ask our students such things. We have had the meetings for more than half a year. These day this activity makes us speak English with less hesitation among Japanese English teachers.

(d) English Class for elementary pupils in our town

Because our town is very small, there is no facility to teach English to elementary pupils to prepare them for study in junior high. We decided to have English classes for elementary pupils with the ALT in our town. There are twenty 6th graders in our town, 18 of whom joined the class. We focus on preparation for their study in junior high, especially oral activity.

I hear that when 6th graders graduate from elementary school, English is the very subject they want to study. But, sad to say, within less than a year, many of them lose their interest in English. Many of them come to our school without basic knowledge of English. We hope our lessons give them a little help to retain interest in English. We think what we are doing now will bear some fruit in years to come when some of them enter our school. As high school teachers, we don't usually have experience to teach English to beginners. This work is exciting and brings new discoveries, which can be used in our daily classes, too. Two years ago we had a conversation class for adults and only 6 students joined the class. In our town elementary pupils have more need to study English.

(e) Japanese lesson for ALT

The former ALT was interested in learning Japanese. (She left Japan for her country, Britain, last July.) Because of the size of my town she had difficulty in finding a Japanese teacher to teach her. After she understood basic knowledge of Japanese grammar, I taught her Japanese once a week in my school from 17:10-18:00. While teaching her, I learned a lot about some difficulties in learning foreign language. This is very helpful for us in teaching a foreign language. I often shared the experiences with my students, which was very useful and good for students.

4) Conclusion

These days as educators, we are surrounded by a lot of difficult problems. In our school we have some students who are always restless in class. We set up a special committee to think of how to deal the problem. The day is over when only a homeroom teacher has to deal with the problem alone. We have to be cooperative. Can't we say the same about English education? As English teachers, we have many challenges to teach English and international understanding to our students. They are living in the world they cannot help but cooperate with the people all over the world. I think we should be good models for our students before we teach them the importance of cooperation with foreign countries.

While writing this report, I look back at what we have done together. If our school had only one JTE without the ALT in this town, we could not have T-T with the JTE, T-T and study meeting with the ALT every week, the JTEs' meetings in English, Japanese lessons for the ALT, the English classes for elementary pupils and so on. I believe our cooperation has encouraged and enabled us to try these challenges.