

# The Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program(me):

Re-Conceptualizing its Methodological Role in Team-Teaching and English Education in Japan

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## Synopsis

Since 1987, the JET Program(me) and team-teaching have been synonymous with English education in Japan. Over the years, ALTs and JTEs have been performing the task of team-teaching largely with a great deal of success—there have been failures, but the successes far outnumber the failures.

As English education enters a new era, a variety of questions still beg for clarification: What is team-teaching? How can team-teaching be properly executed? What is the real purpose of team-teaching? And in which direction is team-teaching moving in the future? This paper addresses these questions in detail, as well as offering alternatives for the future of the JET Program(me) and team-teaching.

Currently, there is a concern that team-teaching and the JET Program(me) have hit a "plateau." In order for both to move forward, some basic, fundamental changes may have to take place to insure that as a program and a methodology they will remain viable in the future.

## Introduction

Since its inception in 1987, the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program(me) has grown tremendously in size and scope. The two precursor programs, the British English Teaching Scheme (BETS) and Monbusho English Fellows (MEFs),<sup>i</sup> from which the current program was born and upon which it was modeled, served as "test" runs for the eventual implementation of the merged programs: The JET Program(me).

The past decade and a half (even longer if one considers the BETS and MEF models) has witnessed a revolution, of sorts, in the teaching of English at the secondary level in Japan. The idea of designing such a program, so ambitious as to invite thousands of native English speakers from a variety of countries to come, live and teach all over the country, is quite remarkable in itself. The implementation of such an enterprising program, after clearing all of the necessary domestic and international bureaucratic hurdles, borders on miraculous. Considering the many documented successes, as well as the inevitable failures that have undoubtedly occurred over the past fifteen years (*cf* McConnell, 2000), the original creators who were responsible for initially dreaming up the blueprint of the JET Program(me) and the progressive concept of having English being taught as a "team" by a Japanese Teacher of English (JTE) and a native Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) must be quite satisfied in

knowing that the *successes* far outnumber any of the *failures* that have transpired since its inauguration. After all, the program continues to grow each year.

As English education in Japan enters a new era, however, a variety of questions regarding the JET Program(me), team-teaching and the future direction of team-teaching in general, still beg for clarification. Perhaps the most basic of questions (and the most obvious) is: *What is team-teaching?* The official, personal and professional circumstances surrounding the team-teachers, and the ever changing conditions in the actual classroom, make this elusive question difficult to answer by the actual people who are involved in the team-teaching act—the JTE and ALT.

In addition, a related question which presents itself is : *How can team-teaching be properly executed in the average English classroom in Japan?* Each teacher has his/her individual goals and desires with regards to the lesson's objective. Also, the JTE and ALT have different cultural and educational backgrounds which influence their opinions and ideas on how to proceed prudently in executing the team-taught lesson. How best can the two teachers merge their collective knowledge, experience and ideas to make a viable, practical and educationally enriching English lesson, utilizing all of the available resources and tools at their disposal? Following this train of thought, it is necessary to pose the question: *What is the real purpose of team-teaching?* A current concern is that team-teaching has reached a "plateau" and in order for this method of teaching to move forward, some basic, fundamental changes must be made to insure that it will be relevant in the future.

Finally, it is imperative to consider the point: *In which direction is team-teaching moving in the future?* Since the new course of study was introduced from April 2002 which emphasizes even more strongly than prior courses of study the need for communicative competency, and there is a real possibility of listening portions being added more broadly to entrance examinations for high schools and universities (including the *Daigaku Nyushi* Center Test), more priority will be needed to be given at the secondary levels in the areas of listening and speaking in order for students to be adequately prepared for these new requisites. A fundamental change in how team-teaching is conducted may need to occur in order to keep up with and to help promote these new changes.

In this paper, I would like to address these questions, as well as offer some concrete suggestions for the future, in order to contribute to the on-going dialogue in educational circles all over Japan concerning the JET Program(me) and team-teaching.

### What is Team-Teaching?

The official definition, as outlined by the Ministry of Education (*Monbukagakusho*)<sup>ii</sup> in its Course of Study, defines team-teaching as a "concerted endeavor made jointly by the Japanese teacher (JTE) and the assistant language teacher (ALT) to create a foreign language classroom in which students are engaged in communicative activities." (Brumby & Wada, 1991: vi)

Perhaps a translation is needed to clarify exactly what the "official" definition intends to relate. A simplified version could read: Try as hard as you can to teach English as a 'team,' using a variety of activities that are fun, interesting, and motivating so the students will want to learn how to speak and understand practical, natural and useful English.

The previous two attempts to define "team-teaching" are actually different interpretations of the same basic concept. In reality, part of the overall problem in effectively defining "team-

teaching" is the fact that JTEs and ALTs have very different cultural attitudes toward and experiences in education in general.

Japanese students are considered to be educated if they have been presented with a certain body of content and they can produce that content on demand. Applying the content, extrapolating from it, analyzing and synthesizing it are not so important in Japanese culture because each educated adult is, so to speak, a utility player on the social team and might be asked to do many kinds of work and social activities which do not stem directly from the content they have been taught. In comparison, students from English speaking countries (and probably also other countries) are considered educated if they have been presented a body of content and are able to reproduce it, apply it, and extend it in their everyday adult life. They are expected to become specialists, not utility players, so what they can do with their knowledge is important. Their ability to extend beyond content into areas of new application are more valued than their flexibility within all possible groups. (Nordquist, 1992: 31)

From the onset of the team-teaching class, then, the two teachers enter into a situation that challenges their own previous experience in education and personal sense of *how* it should be done in accordance to their own involvement, observation, knowledge, participation and training (as learned and experienced in the educational systems from their own respective cultures). The JTE, of course, coming from a Japanese perspective and the ALT coming from a Western context have very different attitudes toward education and more specifically, toward team-teaching. (*cf* McConnell, 2000: 166) In order to move past this cultural and personal obstacle that sometimes inhibits the team-teachers from implementing team-teaching effectively, it is important to delineate in clear and unambiguous terms the "official" definition of team-teaching. This is in order to allow both teachers an equal opportunity to perform their duties using a mutually agreed upon definition. Hopefully, this will better enable the JTE and ALT to perform the task of team-teaching taking into account both educational/cultural traditions in the planning, implementing and evaluation of the team-taught lesson.

Indeed, the two most important points in the "official" definition are the words *create* and *communicative*. (Leonard, 1994: 4) In order to have successful team-teaching take place, it is necessary to "create" an atmosphere conducive to such a task, as well as creating materials that have a pedagogical purpose that compliments the lesson's objective. Also, in order to gain competency in a foreign language, communication of some sort has to take place. Using a variety of "communicative" activities to enhance the officially approved textbook is the essential component in offering students of English a communicative-based curriculum that assists them positively in their pursuit of learning English. (*cf* Gillis-Furutaka, 1994: 38-39)<sup>iii</sup>

It is interesting to note that even after so many years of the successful implementation of team-teaching, Japanese and foreign teachers alike are still unsure about what exactly team-teaching (*a la* the Japanese model) actually entails. Perhaps it is necessary to dissect the official definition into separate components to look at it from a more detailed, if not logical, point of view.

Of course, a "concerted endeavor" by both the JTE and ALT are central in ensuring a successful and beneficial outcome to the team-teaching experience. However, the manner in which the two teachers interact in preparing for and in executing the lesson can make the crucial difference between success and failure of a particular lesson. Related to this are the qualities of personality and character and how well the teachers get along on a personal level. Without a good working relationship, especially in front of the students during the lesson, it is next to impossible to have success in team-teaching.

The term "team-teaching" comes from the notion that the JTE and ALT, as a team, will jointly prepare the materials and activities, decide the aims of the lesson, and execute the lesson's contents. (*Monbusho*, 1994: 14) A breakdown sometimes occurs when the bulk of the materials for the given lesson are prepared by only one of the two teachers in this partnership; the end result, more often than not, is that one teacher is largely left out of the actual teaching act and is under-used in his/her capacity as an educator. This problem not only affects the teacher who is left standing at the side of the classroom bored, it has a negative effect on the students who are much better benefited by having both teachers actively involved in the lesson, working as a "team".

The next component of the definition, which fortunately allows for much flexibility by the two teachers, is the concept of "creating". The vagueness in the definition's wording, in this particular instance, is welcomed and can be used to the advantage of the team-teachers. Basically, this allows them to forge new territory by designing and implementing exercises and activities to construct a lesson which they create themselves. Also, it allows the JTE and ALT to include materials which have a cultural-base that will give students a different point of reference in which to apply English actively for their own, individual purposes. In fact, this could be called "cultural awareness" or "intercultural familiarity" on a personal level because the ALT can explain and show aspects of his/her culture in a regularly scheduled lesson by including cultural-cues related to the grammar and vocabulary's objective of the lesson. This serves two purposes: 1) it helps to internationalize students not only about language, but also about the customs, culture and/or traditions as they relate to the ALT in his/her country; 2) on an individual level, it is internationalization in its purest form—the introduction of *realia* and culture (via the lesson's linguistic objective) by a real, live native speaker of English. Attaching cultural objectives to the language-oriented objective of the lesson helps to broaden students' perspectives about things that are foreign, while still enriching students linguistically by the lesson's content. (*cf Monbusho*, 1994: 15-16)

"A foreign language classroom in which students [and teachers] are engaged in communicative activities" naturally encourages oral communication between the students and the teachers. A "relaxed atmosphere" in the classroom further stimulates interaction between the teachers and students, while also putting everyone involved at ease with one another. In addition, it helps tremendously in building confidence among students. One fear that the average Japanese student has while answering aloud in class is being made to look silly in front of his/her peers during the team-taught lesson by not knowing or incorrectly answering a question. A classroom atmosphere, which fosters positive reinforcement and is conducive to students volunteering and interacting with the teachers and one another, helps to allay fears of making mistakes. It should be made abundantly clear to the students that any answer—right or

wrong—is a part of the overall learning process. (Leonard, 1994: 33) Students must feel comfortable and secure in the classroom in order to be able to take the necessary linguistic risks in volunteering answers to questions.

Although the official, literal definition of team-teaching seems vague and unclear, the practical, working definition used by the two teachers in the field must come from them and their own needs and experience in team-teaching. The key to success in knowing what team-teaching *is* can be realized best through trial and error in knowing empirically what it *is not*. The JTE and ALT's individual interpretations of the official definition, and how they choose to team-teach in their own classrooms, taking into account their students' particular needs, will serve them well in deciding how to proceed forward in successfully implementing team-teaching in the classroom.

### The Execution of Team-Teaching

Once the JTE and ALT have jointly decided on how they will interpret the definition of team-teaching, the next pressing task at hand is how to implement it in such a way that the students and teachers will get the most benefit and exposure from the team-taught English class. Of course, each teacher has his/her own opinions about what constitutes sound pedagogy, but the two must agree initially on how to proceed in order to achieve the lesson's objective.

#### A) *Pre-Class Planning*

Although teachers often argue that a lack of time (Morizumi, 1987) forces them to forego one of the essential components to the team-teaching act—pre-class planning—it is necessary that they find the time to include this crucial step in the team-teaching lesson. The reasons for doing so are many. On the most basic of levels, it establishes communication between the JTE and ALT, as educators and as people, before walking into the classroom. Since many schools have base-ALTs, native teachers who are exclusively assigned to that school, the teachers are at least acquainted with one another. For ALTs who still must travel around to various schools, this becomes all the more important because the JTE and ALT may not know each other at all.

In a research-survey conducted by Osamu Ikeno (1999), the majority of the Japanese teachers in the study revealed that they spent, on average, less than ten minutes in "joint preparation time" for the team-teaching lesson. No one in the survey marked the "thirty minutes or more" selection. In contrast, the ALTs who participated in the survey felt that more time was needed in the preparation phase of the pre-class planning stage of the team-teaching act. "Over half of the ALTs surveyed believed that a minimum of twenty minutes is needed to prepare properly for a day's lesson." (Leonard, 2000 a: 39)

Clearly, ALTs prefer to have a joint meeting in order to discuss the aims of the lesson beforehand. If the two teachers have not met prior to teaching the class, in order to discuss the lesson's objectives, it is more difficult for them to perform their duties to the best of their abilities. With the influx in the widespread use of the internet, e-mail, facsimiles, along with the previous standard forms of communication (mail and telephone), teachers sometimes rely on the electronic modes of communication over face to face meetings. Especially in the initial stages of team-teaching with a new ALT, it is preferable to meet to discuss specifically the lesson's aims.

Sound preparation is key in any type of teaching act, not only in team-teaching. Without

proper knowledge and a thorough understanding of the lesson's outline, the JTE and ALT will not be able to execute effectively the lesson or related activities. Meeting beforehand also encourages a working relationship which is based on a partnership.

Since ALTs hail from a variety of countries and backgrounds<sup>iv</sup>, a pre-class joint planning session allows the JTE to familiarize him/herself with the particular speaking manners, habits and accent of the ALT. This also allows the ALT to become acquainted with the JTE's particular way of speaking English.<sup>v</sup> All in all, a pre-class planning session aids greatly in setting the tone for the actual lesson. This process of language familiarization is important if embarrassing failures of communication between the two teachers are to be avoided in the classroom. (Garant, 1992: 27) A highly successful team-taught lesson invariably includes a time for the teachers to meet and plan the lesson's objectives, as well as create some practical and useful exercises and activities. Each teacher can share in the lesson's duties while clarifying each person's role during the actual class.

### B) *In-Class Interaction*

In the early years of the JET Program(me), while the idea of team-teaching was still alien to the active participants, there was a certain degree of confusion about the roles each teacher should play during the actual lesson. Part of the problem centered on the fact that the whole concept of team-teaching, according to the Japanese model, was so new that no one really knew what to do in the beginning. The entire program began with very little data or research done prior to its implementation to see whether or not it would work. (Cominos, 1992: 5) Even today, after more than a decade, there still is not the plethora of empirical research one would expect (considering all of the time, money and human resources that are invested in it), which addresses team-teaching and how it has changed (for better or worse) English education in Japan. (Sick, 1996: 199)

Over the years, through trial and error, rough blueprints for the procedure of team-teaching and lesson planning began to take shape. As JTEs and ALTs began meeting to discuss ideas and issues concerning team-teaching in formal and officially sponsored conferences and seminars, a working miscellany of games, activities, exercises and photocopy-ready materials began to grow. It was in venues such as these that team-teachers were instructed in the fine art of team-teaching. From these simple beginnings were developed much of the theory, procedures, and materials that are largely still used today in classrooms all over Japan. Hence, this is how the *methodology* of team-teaching was initially born. (Garant, 1992: 25)

The "in-class interaction" stage of the team-teaching act raises many questions: Who is the senior teacher? Who is the primary disciplinarian? Who takes charge of the actual lesson? How do the teachers divide the classroom duties? Should the ALT merely introduce him/herself and play a game in easy English? Should the lesson have a real purpose? In the early years, the road to success had some rather severe bumps. However, as time went on, the wrinkles in the team-teaching fabric began to be ironed out and these questions were answering themselves: The JTE is the senior teacher because s/he has the obligation to make sure the students are taught properly; the JTE is the primary disciplinarian because the ALT is more of a "visitor" in the class and may or may not know the real situation or cause behind the discipline problem; both teachers should take charge of the actual lesson, sharing the lesson's duties equally

(Kahny, et al, 1992: 43); while it is important for the ALT to introduce him/herself, it is necessary that the students are enriched linguistically and culturally from the experience—playing games is acceptable, but as with all aspects of the lesson's plan and objectives, they should have a real purpose.

As the novelty of having a foreign teacher in the classroom wore off, it became apparent that it was necessary to utilize this resource—the ALT—to the fullest. (Cominos, 1992: 5) Early complaints by ALTs (and occasionally today) focused on the fact that they felt they were not being used to their greatest good and ability. Many ALTs lamented being used as "human tape recorders," only pronouncing the "words of the day" for the students to repeat once or twice. (Yokose, 1989: 7) It was obvious then, and still is today, that in order for the ALT to feel like a viable part of the team-teaching procedure, s/he must be utilized in such a way that the students, as well as the JTE, benefits the most from having the native English teacher in the classroom. Ellington (1992) points out that "JET teachers complain that assignments are too vague, they are not given appropriate orientation, and that the examination driven nature of high school education means they lack enough class time to actually improve [sic] the teaching and learning of conversational English." (215-216)

The in-class interaction phase of the entire team-teaching act requires an appropriate configuration to be followed. There are basically three types of situations which occur regularly in the team-teaching classroom: 1) ALT Centered; 2) JTE Centered; and 3) Cooperative Team-Teaching. Only one of these, however, is truly beneficial to all involved.

*i) ALT Centered*

The [ALT] conducts the class and makes all of the decisions in the classroom with minimal to no input from the JTE. The JTE stands in the back of the class and watches the [ALT] teach, play a game, or literally entertain the students for the ensuing period. So much English is used that the students become dis-oriented and frustrated at not being able to comprehend all that is said to them. The JTE feels uncomfortable in interacting with the [ALT] because s/he is unsure of the plan and does not want to make a scene or appear to be confused in front of the students. (Leonard, 1994: 17)

*ii) JTE Centered*

In this English class, the JTE conducts the entire class alone with only occasional assistance from the [ALT] (usually the pronunciation of new words or chorus reading exercises). The [ALT] probably stands off to the side with no active or real role in the lesson plan. The result is largely dissatisfying for the [ALT] who feels awkward at not being included in the lesson, and a bit ridiculous at not being used more in helping the students learn English. Also, too much Japanese is used when English could have been substituted adequately by the visiting [ALT]. (Leonard, 1994: 16)

### *iii) Cooperative Team-Teaching*

The JTE and [ALT] share the classroom and teaching responsibilities and workload, where both teachers constantly interact with one another and with the students in English. (Leonard, 1994: 17)

Of the three descriptions given for the various team-teaching configurations, it is obvious that "cooperative team-teaching" is the preferred style. It incorporates the necessary criteria which help to make up and define team-teaching.

An equal division of labor is needed in order to make the most of both teachers' presence in the classroom. If only one teacher is teaching, and the other is standing off to the side or in the back, automatically 50% of the possible student/teacher contact ratio is lost. By dividing the workload, it makes sharing the responsibility for the success or failure of the lesson more equitable. The pressure placed upon one teacher is tremendous if the lesson happens to be unsuccessful. Also, mutual cooperation by both teachers can give them the chance to talk about and walk through potential trouble-spots while making the lesson and designing the activities. Each teacher will be better able to give his/her opinion and ideas to the other based on experience and pedagogical knowledge before attempting to teach the lesson, deciding what is appropriate and what is not. Joint discussion before the lesson aids in teaching cooperatively during the lesson.

Finally, cooperative team-teaching encourages constant verbal interaction, as well as physical interaction, between the teachers and the students. The students benefit much more from having both teachers actively involved in the teaching-act which fosters a positive learning environment, based on propriety and the integration of language and materials.

### *C) Post-Class Evaluation*

The least favorite of the three areas that incorporate the execution portion of team-teaching is the post-class evaluation phase. Especially, JTEs sometimes find it difficult to discuss candidly, problem areas of a given lesson. ALTs, in general, tend to be more open to criticizing (in a positive way) a particular lesson, exercise, or activity. This difference is largely cultural, but it is also individual. Some people—regardless of whether they are Japanese or foreign—try to avoid confrontation at all costs.

For these people, it is necessary to keep in mind that the post-class evaluation of a lesson is not only for focusing on problem areas; it also offers the JTE and ALT a chance to discuss the successful aspects of the lesson. At the very least, one good point about the lesson, and one point for future improvement should be jointly discussed. By doing so, it allows for open discussion about not only the lesson, but about education, the school, and most importantly, the students. When a time is set aside for discussing the lesson afterwards, a discourse for dialogue is opened up that will help to pave the way for future lessons on how to improve steadily the quality and type of team-teaching lessons the two teachers are producing.

Toshiyuki Furusato (1998) presented an interesting approach to incorporating the post-class evaluation portion in a team-teaching lesson at the National Convention for Secondary English Teachers, sponsored by the then Ministry of Education. In his presentation, Mr. Furusato outlined the procedure he uses, which "involves taping the actual lesson's activities [on video],

then reviewing the tape later with the ALT and students—outside of the English class. He prepares an evaluation sheet for students to write down their comments about the activity; he then collects, collates and analyzes their responses. This gives him [and the ALT] direct insight into how the students are performing and what their feelings are about the team-taught lessons." (Leonard, 1999 b: 39) Of course, this takes a lot of time and planning to pull off, but the results are very rewarding. Both the JTE and ALT truly know which activity worked and which did not. This model, perhaps, is not practical for the majority of team-teachers in the field, but certainly a short post-class evaluation between the JTE and ALT is possible immediately following the team-taught class.

Which is more important, a pre-class planning session, or a post-lesson evaluation? Given the choice, but also considering the logistical and practical aspects of meeting before and after a lesson (*ie* the JTE's time constraints and the ALT's visitation and class schedule at the school), a pre-class planning session that is in-depth may not always be possible. But certainly a post-class evaluation is feasible because both teachers are together immediately following the class, and can take a few moments to discuss jointly the lesson's successes and pitfalls. This short post-class evaluation, then, can serve as a "partial" pre-class planning session in anticipation of future team-taught lessons; because concrete suggestions, as well as decisions, for improving future lessons can be exchanged between the two teachers. It offers an opportunity for dialogue that is needed in order to improve upon the quality of team-teaching being done between the JTE and ALT. In addition, ideas for activities can be modified or adapted from the previous class that can be used in future lessons. By discussing the previous lesson's successes and failures helps immeasurably in smoothing the way for the next team-teaching lesson.

### The Purpose of Team-Teaching

According to the creator of the JET Program(me), Minoru Wada, the actual purpose of the program was two-fold. First, it principally was developed in order to expose the JTE to English spoken by a native; it was hoped that internationalization of the JTEs and the students would take place through this exposure. Second, in order to achieve this goal, it was felt by the administrative bodies (in charge of setting up the program) that inviting scores of foreigners to Japan to team-teach and internationalize Japan in an exchange type of program was much more practical and cost effective than sending legions of Japanese teachers of language to foreign locales. The logic of this decision has been harshly criticized, but the main impetus for doing it this way came down to money. Hiring substitute teachers to teach the classes the Japanese teachers would normally teach while away, was much more costly than bringing "exchange" teachers to Japan from a variety of foreign countries to teach on one-year contracts (renewable twice for a total of three years). (Leonard, 2000: 38-39)<sup>vi</sup>

More specifically, the three administrating Ministries have given very different reasons for implementing the JET Program(me) from the onset. A Ministry of Home Affairs official commented that "frankly speaking, the purpose of the JET Program[me] was never focused on the revolution of English education. The main goal was to get the local governments to open up their gates to foreigners. It's basically a grassroots regional development program." (McConnell, 2000: 30) In contrast, a Ministry of Foreign Affairs official maintained that "our main hope for the JET Program[me] is to increase understanding of Japanese society and

education among youth in the participating countries." (McConnell, 2000: 30) Finally, a Ministry of Education official offered the following explanation: "If Japanese students and teachers improve their communicative competence in English, then they have become more internationalized. This is the goal of the JET Program[me] from the point of view of our Ministry." (McConnell, 2000: 30)

With such varied and opposing goals for the JET Program(me) set out by the actual Ministries administrating it, is it any wonder that in the team-teaching classroom, JTEs and ALTs have a difficult time in deciphering exactly what the *purpose* of team-teaching and the JET Program(me) is from the standpoint of being in the trenches? Hence, another question is raised: Is the purpose merely to be an exchange program that focuses on giving foreign nationals a cross-cultural experience for two or three years, or is it a teaching program that is geared to help improve the communicative ability of the JTEs and students in the team-teaching classroom? It appears, from the above definitions of the program by the various officials of the three Ministries, that in some ways the "exchange" in the program's acronym of "JET" is emphasized more stridently than the actual "teaching."

#### The Future of Team-Teaching and the JET Program(me)

There are several areas that should be reviewed when considering the future of the JET Program(me) and team-teaching and how to improve the quality of both. Of course, the basic concerns of the JTE and ALT, in relation to their day-to-day interactions in the school and classroom, are more easily resolved. These include instituting policies within the schools which allow JTEs to free up their schedules in order to make time to do earnestly pre-class planning and to evaluate the team-teaching lessons with a post-class evaluation; utilize the ALT fully in and out of the classroom; continue to place ALTs in base-schools and gradually do away with infrequent one-shot visits to schools; put more emphasis on listening and speaking in anticipation of a system-wide change where a listening portion will be added to the *Daigaku Nyushi* Center exam, making these communicative skills a real part of a student's educational process; enhance teacher-training and communicative proficiency through more conferences and workshops that focus on the methodology of team-teaching; and at the grassroots level encourage the Ministries to solve the differences in "purpose" when defining the JET Program(me) and team-teaching. (Inoi, 2001: 45) These changes can be incorporated and made largely as the program currently exists.

Perhaps the time has come, however, to re-conceptualize the JET Program(me) and team-teaching in more reform oriented terms in order to insure that both have a bright future. As pointed out earlier, more emphasis seems to be placed upon the "exchange" component of the program's title, rather than on the "teaching"—ALTs are not given much freedom or opportunity to teach and conduct classes alone.

Especially in high schools, the ALT as a resource could be better used by allowing more autonomy to take place between the native teacher of English and the students. With oral communication classes being a centerpiece of the newly revised curriculum, and with the eventual reform in the entrance exam system where a listening portion will most likely be included for entrance into university, it may behoove the administrators of the JET Program(me) and schools to give qualified ALTs their own classes in which to instruct listening

and speaking not as a "team" but as an individual teacher.

Critics of this idea may say that there are a number of issues which need to be addressed before allowing ALTs to teach alone in the classroom (*eg* legal issues as well as proper proof of qualifications, experience, and licensing, to name a few).<sup>viii</sup> These concerns are valid, but it is also prudent to utilize the natural resources of the program—the ALTs—to their fullest. Since its inception, the program has grown tremendously. It has attracted the attention of professional language teachers the world over, so finding suitably qualified teachers who have not only experience in teaching English as a foreign language, but who are also educated in the field of English education in their home countries, is not the problem today that it was fifteen years ago.

I propose that an additional job description be added to the already existing ones (CIR, ALT and SEA) that describes teachers who have the necessary qualifications to teach English professionally—Trained Language Teacher or "TLT." If adopted, these educators would be assigned to senior high schools throughout Japan to teach the oral communication courses. The traditional "ALT" position (where no specific qualifications are required other than being a university graduate and a native English speaker) would continue as is, but would be primarily assigned to team-teach in junior high school English classes, as is currently done. Now, with the inclusion of English in primary schools, these ALTs would be better used in primary school visits, as well as continuing to team-teach lower secondary English classes. The professionally trained teachers, on the other hand, would be utilized in the upper secondary schools.

Of course, it would be necessary for the TLT to follow the prescribed course of study, using the officially approved textbook. The JTE's role (as the senior teacher) with the TLT would be one of "advisor" and "evaluator." The execution of the English lesson would still follow the same procedures, except instead of team-teaching, the TLT and JTE would review the lesson's aims and objectives beforehand to decide what the TLT will cover and how. After the lesson, the two-teachers would meet to discuss how to improve upon the lesson, similar to a regular ALT/JTE team-taught lesson.

The in-class interaction stage of a TLT taught lesson would be different, in that the TLT would be conducting the class alone. The JTE, in the role of evaluator, however, would periodically visit and observe the lesson in order to offer advice and suggestions on teaching-style and material design. Foreign teachers who would qualify to teach as TLTs would not need a lot of supervision, as they will have proven themselves in the classroom and in teaching prior to being accepted as a participant on the program.

### Conclusion

The JET Program(me) and team-teaching has achieved much over the past decade and a half. They have become a part of the English-language landscape in Japan and are not the novelty they once were. The actual participants—the JTEs and ALTs—have worked diligently to define for themselves what it is to team-teach; how to implement it in the best possible manner; and how to understand the purpose behind having foreign teachers in the classroom. Perhaps it is time to re-evaluate the basic constructs of both, in order to allow them to move off the current plateau and to allow them to soar to the next level. In order to achieve the suggested objectives outlined in this paper, it is now time to transfer the current emphasis on the "exchange"

portions of the program, to one that fully incorporates and emphasizes the "teaching" aspects. As English education in Japan enters a new era, it is time to review critically the purpose behind having native teachers in the classroom, and to offer concrete changes to insure that these teachers will be used to their fullest potential in the future.

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<sup>i</sup> Although the BETS and MEF programs were inherently different, "they both shared the common goal of inviting native speakers of English to aid in the instruction of English, and to help improve upon the methods and means to do so. Initially, the American MEFs were mainly intended to assist the English Teaching Consultant (ETC) in the training of Japanese teachers. These native teachers eventually began to visit schools directly and hence began the idea of having a 'base school.' In contrast, the BETS were always sent to schools from the beginning. They were not only expected to assist in language instruction, but also to foster mutual understanding and better relations between Japan and Britain. These programs helped to build the structure which currently makes up the various configurations of assignments in the JET Program(me) (*ie* base school, semi-regular, one-shot)." (Leonard, 1999 a: 38)

<sup>ii</sup> From the beginning, *Monbusho* was one part of the triumvirate group of Ministries which oversaw the creation and implementation of the JET Program(me); the other two being *Gaimusho* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and *Jichishou* (Ministry of Home Affairs). The Ministry of Education later became the "Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology;" the Ministry of Home Affairs also changed and is now the "Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications." (CLAIR, 2001: 2) Of course, the Ministry of Education (formerly *Monbusho*, now *Monbukagakusho*) was and still is largely responsible for the educational arm of the JET Program(me), most principally designing and setting up the concept of "team-teaching." The Ministry of Foreign Affairs concentrates mainly on "headhunting" potential participants via the consulates and embassies in foreign countries. It processes the visa applications as well as advertises the JET Program(me) overseas. The Ministry of Home Affairs handles all of the domestic issues regarding the program, and assists in the placing of JET teachers and CIRs in the various prefectures, cities and towns. (Aldwinkle, 1999: 3)

<sup>iii</sup> Gillis-Furutaka (1994) points out that communicative language teaching "involves creating situations in which students interact with each other, with written, audio or visual input and with the teacher(s). It provides opportunities for students to go beyond the practice of grammatical structures to using them to express as best they can what they want or need to communicate to others. The focus is therefore on meaning rather than on form." (38-39)

<sup>iv</sup> Although in recent years the JET Program(me) has expanded to include a variety of countries from which participants come from, the primary-base for native English teachers remains roughly the same as before. In 2001, the USA had the most JET Program(me) participants with 2,477; next was Great Britain with 1,405, followed by Canada with 1,057; Australian participants numbered 417, New Zealand 371, and Ireland 95. Out of the total number of JET Program(me) participants [including ALTs, Coordinators

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for International Relations (CIRs), Sports Exchange Advisors (SEAs)] which numbers over 6,000, the bulk of these people are ALTs whose native language is English. (CLAIR, 2001 : 3)

<sup>v</sup> In an interesting study sponsored by *Monbukagakusho* and conducted by a team of researchers (Shin-ichi Inoi, Nobuya Itagaki, Takashi Yoshida, and Sean Mahoney), a large-scale questionnaire-based research project was implemented with the initial aim of gathering data to improve the JET Program(me). Many revealing comments were made by the subjects of the study regarding the ALT/JTE relationship in the classroom while team-teaching. In particular, one ALT commented, "It is embarrassing and frustrating for an [ALT] to not understand the JTEs' English." (Inoi, et al, 2001: 23) This demonstrates how important it is for the JTE and ALT to meet to discuss a lesson in order to familiarize one another with each other's particular manners and speaking habits. It is best to try to avoid any "embarrassing" moments (from a lack of understanding or familiarization) in front of the students at all costs.

<sup>vi</sup> It should be noted that in an interview in 1992, Minoru Wada commented on the limitation of contract years of JET participants: "I do not like the rule. Many JTEs who are extremely enthusiastic about team-teaching also dislike it. Forcing ALTs to leave their positions after three years inflicts an enormous loss on the development of foreign language education in the schools. Much money is also wasted. However, the JET Program is a cooperative venture between several Ministries, and this rule represents a kind of compromise between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Home Affairs, which is very keen on promoting cultural exchange objectives of the Program. They are therefore keen on some kind of time limit so that more and more people can take part." (Cominos, 1992: 13) Critics of the system of bringing foreign teachers to Japan, rather than sending Japanese teachers overseas, maintain that in the short-term, perhaps, the cost would be more (when considering the cost of hiring substitute teachers, etc), but by giving the JTEs a chance to live and team-teach abroad, it would give them real-life experience that would have long-term benefits in Japan after they return back to Japan. A counterpoint to this argument, however, is the fact that not every Japanese teacher may want or be able to go abroad for an extended period (*eg* familial obligations at home, lack of motivation or desire to do so, etc).

<sup>vii</sup> In an interview, Minoru Wada addressed this very concern as follows: "I think that the Ministry must give very careful thought to allowing suitably qualified ALTs to teach alone. Before this can be done, there are of course a number of complex legal issues which must be addressed. The point, however, is that the program continues to attract a number of people who are either qualified secondary school teachers in their own countries, or who possess considerable teaching in tertiary institutions, where a teacher's license may not be considered necessary or else are recent graduates with MA degrees in such fields as TEFL/TESL or applied linguistics. Under the current rules such people are simply not permitted to teach alone." (Cominos, 1992: 5)

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