

Team Teaching: Finding the Middle Ground

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As a third-year ALT I have worked hard over the past few years on the program to fully develop skills that would be useful for me. I had to find out how I could support my JTEs, but I also had ways I wanted them to support me. Teamwork sounds like such an easy concept, but teamwork can be quite difficult if you can't find the middle ground between ALT and JTE. Finding the middle ground requires understanding what an ALT is and their responsibilities, learning how JTEs can support ALTs and having a good working relationship.

ALTs and their responsibilities

What is an ALT? According to the ALT General Information Handbook, an ALT is someone whose main duty is to engage in team teaching with JTEs on foreign languages.

1. Not all ALTs have a degree in Education.

After meeting ALTs from various parts of Japan, I learned that some JTEs might have the misconception that all ALTs have a degree in Education and are able to teach. This could not be further from the truth.

Many ALTs do not have a teaching degree, or even teaching experience so they might be very nervous about teaching. However, that means that it does fall on the ALT to do some research about teaching, whether by talking to older ALTs, JTEs or doing research on the internet before teaching their first lesson. That being said, it is the responsibility of both the JTE and ALT to clearly communicate about the expectations for the ALT at their school.

2. Go watch JTE's lessons sometimes.

Before an ALT teaches their first lesson, it is important to go and watch at least one of each of their JTE's lessons. Doing this is an opportunity for the ALT to learn from a JTE with more teaching experience. When watching these lessons ALTs should focus on;

- How is the JTE interacting with the student?
- What can they learn from what the JTE is doing in their lesson?
- How is the JTE engaging with the students?
- Can the ALT adapt their teaching style to fit with the JTEs teaching style?

3. Scheduling pre-lesson meetings with JTEs about team teaching.

Planning is very important for lessons, JTEs should always be aware of what you plan to teach. However, JTEs do not have a lot of free time so it's best to schedule a meeting time that works for both of you; I suggest that you try and get a time before the lesson. During these meetings, the following need to be discussed:

- What kind of lesson does the JTE want the ALT to teach?
- What topic does the JTE want the ALT to teach?

Although the initial meeting should be about what lesson the JTE wants the ALT to prepare, I advise that the ALT goes to the meeting with a possible lesson ready. Creating a lesson plan (see Appendix A for example) helps as ALTs have many JTEs and organizing a meeting time for all of them is very difficult.

How JTEs can support ALTs

JTEs are the bridge between ALTs and their job, so the support of JTEs is very important.

1. Explain to ALTs how the Education system in Japan works.

Every country has its own unique education structure, and this can make teaching scary for ALTs as it feels like you're playing a game where you don't know the rules. Some countries have a very different education structure compared to Japan. Thus, it falls on JTEs to explain to ALTs how English education works in Japan, so that the ALT can understand where they can be useful to the JTEs and students.

2. Make your expectations clear

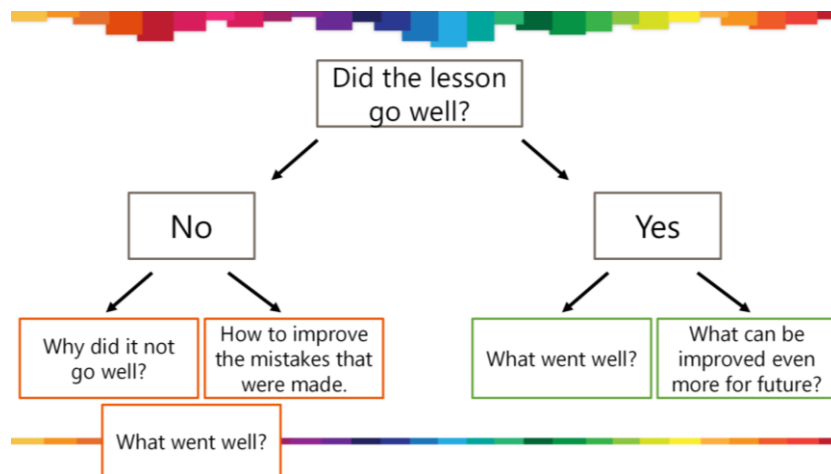
JTEs have a lot of teaching experience so things that might seem easy to the JTE might be very difficult for an ALT. If JTEs have expectations of ALTs without clearly communicating them, they will be disappointed if the ALT does not meet those expectations; which will make working together more difficult for both the JTE and ALT. In order to make expectations clear, focus on the following points:

- What should the ALT do for lessons? Ex. Create a full 50-minute lesson? A short 15-minute activity?
- What should the ALT teach? Ex. Making speaking-based activities? Teaching from the textbook? Create a game for students to play?

3. Give constructive feedback

ALTs are always willing to hear feedback on how they can improve their lessons. If they are only ever told, "It was great!" they won't be able to improve. Or, if a lesson didn't go so well, telling them it was good leaves a negative impact on not just the ALT's teaching abilities but also the students.

That being said, feedback is always best when you can also provide a small solution or some advice. Please refer to the table below on when feedback is appropriate and what type of feedback to give.



A good working relationship

A good working relationship is very important between ALT's and JTE's. You don't have to be friends who go drink coffee after work together, but being able to have a positive relationship at work will make team teaching a lot more effective. Here are some key factors that are important for a good working relationship.

- Good communication
- Mutual understanding of each other's roles.
- Working together to create something great.
- Respecting each other and each other's time.

If you are able to build a good working relationship you will be able to achieve many things.

1. It will make teaching together easier. Teamwork is very important between the JTE and the ALT.
2. Team teaching will become more enjoyable for not just the ALT and the JTE, but also the students. If there is a strained relationship between the ALT and the JTE, the students will pick up on it because they are more perceptive than people realize.
3. And most importantly if you have a solid foundation with open communication, it will be easier to understand each other. Mutual understanding will help build respect for each other.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the middle ground between ALTs and JTEs can be found by both parties working together to create the best possible working relationship built on communication, respect, and mutual understanding. It requires both sides putting in an effort and supporting each other. Team teaching can truly be a wonderful opportunity for everyone involved if the JTE and the ALT are able to work together effectively and harmoniously.

ALT Lesson Planning Form 2024

Class: _____

Date(s): _____

Length of Period: _____

1. Type of lesson:

Grammar		Listening		Speaking	
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2. Aims of the lesson:

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3. Integrated Skills:

	Reading		Listening
	Speaking		Writing

4. Lesson Outcome(s):

4.1 **At the start of this lesson learners should already**

(what should learners already know and be able to do?)

4.2 **By the end of the lesson learners should be able to**

(state new knowledge, skills, values, etc.)

5. Lesson Phases:

5.1 Theme (Context, big idea)

5.2 Introduction

5.3 Development

5.4 Consolidation

6. LTSMs (Educational Tools such as YouTube links, worksheets, etc.)

