



Professional Development and the JET Program: Insights and Solutions Based on the Sendai City Program

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This paper examines the role professional development can play for Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) and native speaker Assistant English Teachers (AETs) working together in the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program. Aiming for a communicatively-based team-taught approach, the program has been in existence in Japanese high schools since 1987. Japanese government documents, academic reports, and participants' reflections have been examined to reveal some of the program's shortfalls. A detailed description of Sendai City's training and in-service system is offered as a way to maximize the success of the JET Program through consistent professional support for JTEs and AETs.



Insert Japanese Abstract Here

The JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Program commenced in Japan in 1987, bringing 813 native speakers of English to team teach with Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs). The program is managed by the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR), an organization created by the Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture (Monbusho), the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. CLAIR recruits foreign Coordinators for International Relations (CIRs), Sports Exchange Advisors (SEAs), and Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) who are then employed throughout Japan. As-



sistant English Teachers (AETs) are a subset of the ALT group, comprising 90% of CLAIR's annual participants (Council of Local Authorities for International Relations [CLAIR], 2000, p. 7). These AETs are placed in educational centers around Japan to provide native speaker input into English classes at junior and senior high schools. At present, ten participating countries (Australia, Canada, Ireland, Israel, Jamaica, New Zealand, Singapore, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States) are the source of AETs, with just under 5500 AETs working throughout Japan in the 2000-2001 school year (CLAIR, 2000, p. 7).

The program was initiated with the specific aim of helping to internationalize Japanese students through classroom activities and to build the English language skills of both students and JTEs (Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture [Monbusho], 1994, p. 6). In particular, the Monbusho wanted teachers of English to shift from the grammar-translation approaches popular in Japanese schools to a more communicative-based methodology, with the AETs' native-speaker abilities being utilized to achieve this aim. This resolve has been further strengthened with the current Monbusho Course of Study (Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, 1994, p. 98-115), which directs English to be taught in a far more communicative style than ever before. This has placed pressure on JTEs to make appropriate changes to their methodology and to enlist the support of the AETs within the school system.

These innovations have challenged all those involved. Rather than operating as instructors working in isolation in the classroom, JTEs have found themselves having to change their teaching practices, putting the language they teach into everyday use in negotiation with the AETs, and approaching English in different ways for the benefit of their students. While these changes were part of the Monbusho's overall strategy to improve the teaching and language skills of JTEs (Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, 1994, p. 6), the presence of English native speakers in their classrooms has caused many JTEs to be concerned about their roles and competence as teachers, with tensions and pressures emerging between the two groups (Goldberg, 1995, p. 11).

These problems may be due to the fact that the JET Program was introduced with only a minimum of preparation for both JTEs and AETs. At the outset, many AETs found themselves placed at schools or with boards of education where the teachers and administrative staff were unaware of ways in which to effectively utilize the newly-arrived assistants (Egginton, 1997). In numerous cases, AETs found themselves sitting in staff rooms without work to do, perhaps brought into the occa-

sional class to read out list of words in the role of “human tape recorder” (Egginton, 1997).

However, as the JET Program has developed, changes have taken place in an attempt to meet the needs of JTEs and AETs. More assistance and support is now available to them, especially in the form of seminars, workshops and conferences (Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, 1994, pp. 10-13). For JTEs and AETs, these regularly scheduled offerings explore areas such as insights into teaching methods and techniques, presentations of collective classroom experiences and ideas, and discussions on the value of team teaching.

With the JET Program entering its fourteenth year, AETs have become recognized staff members of many schools and boards of education. In general, there has been a growing acceptance of English native speakers in the school system, and JTEs are more likely to enlist the aid of the AET in their classes than when the program and the concept of team teaching were in their initial stages (Pattimore & Kobayashi, 1999; Egginton, 1997, p. 315). Additionally, AETs and JTEs have begun to develop a better grasp of the practicalities of team teaching. Their attendance at conferences and workshops and their combined experiences in the program have meant that there is now a far larger collection of data on the English language team teaching experience at Japanese public schools that can be drawn upon.

Still, this does not mean that the process of integrating native speaker AETs into the teaching practice of the majority of JTEs has been accomplished flawlessly. Many AETs still privately express the same concerns and frustrations about their position and the effectiveness of their team teaching partners as was the case in the late 1980s. In addition, while training and support is offered, it does not always meet the range and depth required to optimize English teaching and the JTE-AET professional relationship. This paper sets out to show that more professional development needs to be offered to these teachers to achieve the goals set by the Monbusho.

Difficulties of Implementation

Lack of Training

JTEs

In terms of pre-service education, JTEs receive scant training in TESL skills (Lamie, 2000; Yonesaka, 1999; Browne & Wada, 1998; LoCastro, 1996, p. 42, Gillis-Furutaka, 1994, pp. 35-38). For the vast majority of prospective English teachers in Japan, there are no special courses on

the various approaches to teaching, and for the few who do learn about such techniques, there is little chance to see them in practice, or put them into effect during the two weeks they spend in doing practice teaching (Lamie, 2000; Yonesaka, 1999; Browne and Wada, 1998). This limited training does not touch on the subject of team teaching with a native speaker of English even though most JTEs will have access to AETs in their new schools. Yonesaka states that at Japanese universities "the required coursework [of prospective JTEs] is under constant revision" (1999, p. 9), but these revisions appear to be addressing topics other than English teaching (1999, p. 9). Therefore, many graduating JTEs are not prepared for the demands of team teaching or communicative language teaching as encouraged by the Monbusho.

After placement at schools JTEs receive minimal in-service opportunities, but are expected to keep up to date with new teaching approaches, and meet the guidelines set down by the Monbusho. Lamie (1999, p. 65) notes that a major overseas program for JTEs has had fewer than 100 trainees in the past ten years, and suggests the need for more extensive in-service training opportunities both in and outside of Japan. In her opinion, professional development sessions "are necessary to change teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and classroom practice, and to enable them to deliver the revised curriculum effectively" (Lamie, 1999, p. 64). Fanselow (1994) encourages a kind of "reverse-JET Program" to alter the current system of teaching English in Japan which would involve sending "at least 10% of JTEs to English-speaking countries each year for professional preparation and English study" (1994, p. 214). Although not as zealous as Fanselow, Smith (1994) fully encourages extensive support in information and assistance regarding team teaching and TESL methodology through in-service training programs for both JTEs and AETs (p. 88).

However, there seems to be some reluctance by the Monbusho to extend in-service training opportunities. In response to the call for the JTEs' training to be "further emphasized and improved" (Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, 1999, p. 3), the Monbusho responded that the pool of 60,000 JTEs across Japan was too large to manage. Instead the Monbusho suggested that the JTEs should take advantage of existing seminars and workshops, taking it upon themselves to form self-help groups and draw on published materials (p. 3). The Monbusho's solution seems to leave the majority of the decisions regarding in-service training to the local governments and to administrators and individuals at the school level.

However, it is clear that further development needs to occur to help the JTEs move towards the communicative style of teaching that the Monbusho wishes to see used in the EFL classroom. At the least, it is

clear that most JTEs require more systematic preparation and a forum to explore ways in which to produce junior and senior high school students who are competent communicators in English. The only way this will occur is with extended exposure to different teaching approaches and an opportunity to learn and practice such techniques.

AETs

When recruited, AETs must meet certain requirements regarding their country of origin, language ability and age (CLAIR, 1999, pp. 16-17), but they need not have a background in teaching or education. In fact it has been suggested that people without experience are preferred (Goldberg, 1995) and the Monbusho has abandoned programs in which trained teachers were brought to Japan (e.g., the Monbusho English Fellows and British English Teachers schemes) in favor of the current system (Ministry of Education, Science Sports and Culture, 1994, p. 7). While some training is offered to participants in the JET Program, the Monbusho actually states that the process of planning, delivering, and assessing the classes will provide development opportunities for both JTEs and AETs (Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, 1994, p. 17). However this view assumes that both parties will have the ability to start and maintain this process with a minimum of official guidance.

Outside the Monbusho these deficiencies have been recognized, and calls have been made for AETs to have stronger pedagogical foundations. Wada and Cominos (1994, pp. 4-5) discuss this in detail, as do Gillis-Furutaka (1994, p. 39-41) and Fanselow (1994, p. 214), all suggesting the need for experienced or qualified AETs. However, CLAIR and the Monbusho appear to be resolute in their choice of hiring untrained individuals for the JET Program, to whom they offer rudimentary grounding in teaching methodology and team teaching strategies after they arrive in Japan (Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, 1994, pp. 10-13).

AETs also see the advantage of in-service training throughout their time in the program. Freeman (1997, p. 318) writes that the JET Program is challenged by "the fact that most ALTs have little or no teacher training," and while stating that "ALTs do not need to be teacher trained," she goes on to write that "they need to be given the tools and the know-how to be effective in second language, team taught classes" (1997, p. 318). Although conferences are provided for both AETs and JTEs, most of the sessions involve the participants sharing their experience and knowledge. While it cannot be denied that the sharing aspect of these conferences is valuable, many sessions are merely a rep-

etition of previously imparted knowledge (Gillis-Furutaka, 1994, p. 33) and some AETs desire input by trained professionals (Luoni, 1997, p. 318).

Nevertheless most AETs realize that training is only part of the issue. Although they feel they are sometimes “still used as human tapes recorders or baby sitters with entertaining games” (Egginton, 1997, p. 315), or are simply ignored at their workplaces, they realize that their co-teachers require training:

[O]ne way to overcome many of the hesitations of the Japanese English teachers is to provide more programs locally as well as internationally and expose them to other forms of teaching. Although the JET Program is attempting this, it is not enough (Kinjo, 1997, p. 309).

AETs, therefore, see the benefit of Japanese teachers receiving a chance to acquire a greater understanding of the variety of teaching approaches that can be employed. In turn, they realize that, as AETs, they will be put to better use if the JTEs have a greater understanding of teaching methodologies.

In short, the success of team teaching in the JET Program will be enhanced by professional development and training and professional academic support for both JTEs and AETs. Although it is not suggested that the JET Program will fail without these foundations, denying this assistance seems likely to result in the program being less effective, and perhaps never revealing its actual potential to the participants in the teaching web—JTEs, AETs, students, school administration, families of the students, and Japanese society as a whole.

Institutional Conflicts

A number of writers have also questioned the apparently conflicting signals the Monbusho is sending out to teachers. Gorsuch (1999) argues that while the Monbusho stresses the need for a more communicative classroom, the textbooks that are authorized do not make allowances for compatible approaches, a claim also found in Browne and Wada (1998) and Knight (1995). In their survey Browne and Wada (1998) found that many JTEs indicated that the main expectation regarding their instruction was “to teach the contents of the textbook” (p. 105). As a result, in order to achieve the Monbusho’s expectations as stated in their guidelines (Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, 1994, pp. 98-115), JTEs and AETs have to spend considerable time adapting texts and creating materials and activities. It could be



expected that teachers would see this mismatch as a conflict in goals.

Similar concerns extend to testing, where the Monbusho also seems to be sending mixed messages to JTEs and AETs. Murphey (1999) notes that “[The] Monbusho tells high school teachers to teach oral communication, and yet their entrance exams do not reflect this change. Teachers are caught in the midst of confusing messages” (p. 39). The Monbusho’s guidelines express a need for communication in the classroom, but Japanese high school and university examinations test a very different area of language. Murphey claims the Monbusho is using “the rhetoric of values without acting upon them,” which may lead to teachers engaging in “schizophrenic activities” (p. 39). Browne and Wada (1998) found that a major pressure on the teaching styles of JTEs was “to prepare students for the entrance examination” (p. 104), which suggests that teachers are more likely to teach towards the content of the exam rather than endanger the success of the students by focusing on communicative approaches. One could argue that it is possible for the content of entrance examinations to be addressed through the use of communicative approaches in the classroom (see Law, 1994), but it is to be expected that most teachers will continue to draw on traditional teaching methods to ensure that their students pass the exams.

It is not suggested here that the Monbusho is consciously working against the success of its communicative goals, but these incongruities imply that an overall policy to link the stated aims and the practical aspects of teaching is not yet in place. It is perhaps this lack of an overall policy which best explains why the present training and in-service training for JTEs does not incorporate communicative approaches and team teaching.

Sendai’s Program

In Sendai City, the capital of Japan’s northern Tohoku region, a plan has emerged to address some of the problems associated with the shortcomings of the existing program. Progress is being made in offering substantial support and training opportunities to the AETs and JTEs employed by the Sendai Board of Education.

Sendai is an “officially designated” city (i.e., one operating independently of the provincial government) with a population of just over one million. The city Board of Education administers 70 public junior and senior high schools with more than 35,000 students and 2,250 academic staff, of whom 260 are JTEs. The schools range in size from a semi rural junior high school with just 18 students and 13 teachers to an inner-suburban junior high school with 50 educators and an enrolment of over 950.

The city has an exceptionally proactive attitude towards the JET Program and English education within its schools. Starting with just one AET in 1988, Sendai has since achieved its goal established in 1996 of providing each high school with a full time native English speaker. In the same year the city established the International Education Group (IEG) within the Board of Education's Guidance and Supervisory Division (*Shidouka*) with the aim of assisting the local AETs. The IEG initially consisted of two Japanese teacher counselors along with an AET advisor (a former AET concerned with the AETs' salaries, housing, health, and general well-being). Later in 1996 a qualified TESOL professional was recruited as Chief Advisor to conduct lectures, seminars, and workshops for all teachers and to mentor AETs. Currently, the IEG has four members.

While Sendai receives the majority of its AETs directly from CLAIR, the city also has its own private hiring system, the "Hello World Plan." Under this scheme, Sendai is able to recruit a minimum of 10 AETs per year to make up for any shortfall of teachers supplied by CLAIR. The salary, working conditions, and general benefits provided to successful applicants match those of the JET Program, and in regards to training, meetings, support, and access to teaching materials, these recruits are treated the same as the JET Program AETs. This system thus allows Sendai to partially regulate the quality and standards of AETs working for the Board of Education.

Benefits for AETs

After arrival in Sendai, new AETs receive a full week's orientation providing them with an overview of ESL/EFL techniques along with cultural and survival tips for working and living in Japan. In addition to the IEG staff, currently employed AETs participate in the orientation, contributing their insights and experiences. The new AETs are issued teaching materials and Sendai-produced handbooks and are invited to attend the twice-monthly seminars held at the local Education Center.

As stated earlier, AETs in the JET Program usually do not have prior teacher training or teaching experience. Consequently, providing the opportunity for them to learn about teaching is imperative in making their experience in the program successful. Surveys by Scholefield (1996) and Pattimore and Kobayashi (1999) have shown that most JTEs desire greater training for the AETs they work with, and Sendai's professional development program works towards satisfying some of these needs. In addition, the training the AETs receive also has an impact on their JTE team members since the results of their training can be witnessed by and drawn upon by the JTEs. Although not as effective as

having the JTEs themselves attended the training, this “osmotic” effect the JTEs receive may be valuable to them. In fact, many Sendai AETs have noted that their JTEs have expressed interest in the content of seminars by asking for teaching ideas and suggestions presented in the workshops.

It is also felt that the AETs receive an extra incentive by being members of an education program that fosters development in its employees. The hope is that, by treating AETs as professionals and providing opportunities for their training, a higher teaching standard will be engendered. This demonstrates that the Sendai Board of Education is supportive of the AETs in wishing to enhance their teaching skills. It is also hoped that Sendai’s approach will instill a sense of obligation and professional pride in the JET Program participants, even if they do not intend to stay beyond their initial 12 month contract or have no further plans for teaching.

Professional Development for AETs and JTEs

The Chief Advisor is responsible for designing and conducting Sendai’s in-service seminars, which are open to both JTEs and AETs. These two-hour sessions usually take place on weekday afternoons in the city’s Education Center. Usually classes are limited to 30 people but when there is demand for particular sessions extra seminars are provided. These classes cover a range of topics such as the history of ELT methodologies and techniques, using music as a teaching tool, and developing professional relationships. The sessions are delivered in English adjusted in consideration of the JTEs’ English ability and level of teaching skills.

The materials used in the classes are also selected in consideration of the language level of the JTEs. Extracts from *Teach English* (Doff, 1988), a text designed for non-native speakers of English, are frequently used and other teacher training texts are summarized and simplified where necessary. Longer and more complex extracts are sent to JTEs in advance and there are extra handouts for those attending the sessions to take home. There are also many opportunities for JTEs to develop their English communication skills through discussions, planning, and other activities held with the participating AETs. Thus, the seminars offer a chance for AETs and JTEs to develop their knowledge of teaching theory and practice as well as assisting the development of JTEs’ English language proficiency.

Professional development is also enhanced by the IEG through school visits. While these occasions can be stressful for those being observed, a concerted effort has been made to make these experiences less of a

traditional “inspection” and more of a learning experience for the teachers concerned. School visits are a regular part of the Guidance and Supervisory Division’s duties, but the Sendai IEG has promoted a change in attitude towards these visits. Observation of classes now occurs throughout the year, with the timing of visits set through negotiations between the IEG, AETs, JTEs, and the school administration. The visits usually take place at the request of AETs and JTEs who see the value of having a class critiqued. Rather than being a “policing” activity, the observations are presented as a way to develop teaching skills. In a number of cases, JTEs who were observed (but who had not previously attended the city-run seminars offered) decided that participation in workshops would contribute to their abilities as teachers and have begun attending on a regular basis. In addition AETs have noted changes in their partners’ approaches after these observations.

Sendai’s Problems

Even with such a substantial program in place, there are still problems in the system. The first Chief Advisor was appointed primarily to develop the AETs’ teaching knowledge and skills. However it was subsequently realized that, no matter how well the AETs were trained, substantial improvements in the quality of team teaching could not occur until local JTEs were fully involved in the process. Thus the twice-monthly seminars that are conducted by the current Chief Advisor are now chiefly aimed at the JTEs, with AETs brought in as assistants.

However, attracting JTEs to the seminars has been a major challenge. At most seminars no more than 10 out of a possible 260 JTEs are present, and some of the reasons behind this low attendance shall be explored here. First, many teachers are highly committed to their jobs. A Japanese junior high school teacher’s official working hours are usually between 8:15 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday to Friday, with a half day on every second Saturday. However, the majority of teachers are also involved in other duties, such as coaching sporting teams, running school clubs, and counseling students, that keep them at the school as late as 10:00 p.m. School vacations also see many teachers running club and sporting activities on the school premises.

Considering these pressures, finding time to go to seminars which start at 3:00 p.m. on weekday afternoons is often difficult for teachers. While the availability of in-service training for JTEs is not innovative, the concept of a Japanese Board of Education offering a regularly scheduled optional in-service training program is relatively new. The elective nature of this training program means that teachers have to seek permission from their school’s administration to attend. However a



teacher choosing to leave school and attend an in-service session may be viewed as an avoidance of responsibility, a perception that a teacher would not wish to give to other staff members. It can therefore be awkward for teachers to absent themselves from the workplace, even for a teaching development seminar, when other members of the staff are still at work.

An additional factor in the poor attendance of JTEs may be the attitude of senior teachers and administrators. Even though the Monbusho is supportive of teacher development, senior elements within schools may not always be highly in favor of the JET Program, and may not encourage the growth of their staff's teaching skills or developments in the JTE/AET teaching relationship. In fact some individuals are concerned that JTEs are already in a special position since they have AETs to work with them in and outside of class and have a greater opportunity for educational advancement through seminars. The acceptance of in-service training programs is slowly changing, but, as LoCastro (1996, p. 43) states, "individuals find resistance at their places of employment to their participation in outside in-service training activities." Even though the training provided by the Sendai IEG can be considered "outside" the programs listed by LoCastro (p. 42) (e.g., sessions conducted by JALT, the British Council, and publishers), since Sendai's teacher development is still elective, and therefore there is a degree of resistance similar to that described by LoCastro.

Yet another cause of low attendance could possibly be the JTEs' concerns about their level of English. Evaluations by JTEs after the local annual MidYear Block conferences (organized by the local prefectural Board of Education) usually find the respondents commenting on their difficulty in following the English presentations given by AETs. Sendai's seminars are conducted in English and, although consideration is given to the JTEs' proficiency during the preparation and delivery of the sessions, informal feedback has indicated that the topics covered sometimes require language skills beyond their capability. Therefore, even though they are teachers of English, a number of JTEs have indicated their hesitation to attend sessions covering technical aspects of teaching.

JTEs could also be intimidated by the English speaking skill of the AETs who attend the sessions. The AETs enjoy participating in the seminars but they sometimes forget the language abilities of the JTEs, and start discussing issues in a manner akin to that in Western higher education classrooms. Their enthusiasm is very engaging but a number of Sendai JTEs who have taken part in seminars have admitted their hesitation in attending subsequent sessions because of the speed and com-

plexity of English that the AETs sometimes use when making comments.

For other JTEs, negative experiences at previous in-service training sessions may have colored their views about professional development. Results compiled by Browne and Wada (1998) suggest that JTEs often feel that mandatory training is not of a particularly high quality. It is possible that some teachers may transfer this perception to other sessions offered by a Board of Education. They may be under the impression that the seminars offered are irrelevant or not interesting.

Finally, there are also some JTEs who have no interest in improving either their English or teaching skills. Many individuals are in English teaching positions to which they have grown accustomed, and for many there is no incentive to go beyond what they are doing at present. They feel that they can continue to teach English successfully without having to attend seminars and workshops. It has been noted earlier that Monbusho-approved materials and tests based on these materials do not thoroughly test the communicative skills of the students (Gorsuch, 1999; Murphey, 1999). As a result, JTEs may feel that enhancing their skills or initiating new approaches would not prove any more rewarding for their students than the methods they currently employ.

Solutions

In general, there needs to be greater support and encouragement for in-service training for both JTEs and AETs in Japan. This support must come from all levels, from the Monbusho down to the schools themselves. As mentioned earlier, the calls for more in-service training have come from a variety of sources, but the Monbusho response to date has been less than encouraging. The lack of any initiative or innovation with regards to these matters would seem to indicate that the Monbusho may believe that improvement will occur without the introduction of any further system of training and professional development.

One way to encourage self-development in JTEs would be to offer more seminars to help their communicative English skills. Improved language skills would have an impact on their knowledge of and confidence in using English, similar to Li's finding (1998) regarding local teachers of English in his study of communicative language teaching in South Korea. Not only would improved English language skills give JTEs greater access to and understanding of English teaching materials and resources, but this development would also promote the professional and personal relationships that the JTEs have with their AETs. However, English language classes would most likely have the same atten-

dance problems as the in-service training program.

Another issue concerns the cultural suitability of what is being required from the JTEs, their students and Japan's educational system. In setting its sights on communicative approaches, the Monbusho is supporting a methodology that may not be suitable for the teaching culture of Japan. Pennycook (1994) writes of the inappropriateness of communicative language teaching in a number of educational and cultural contexts (pp. 170-173), and such may be the case in Japan as well. Since the Monbusho is unlikely to reconsider its decision concerning the use of communicative approaches, providing avenues for in-service training can open JTEs' minds to methods that can complement the cultural background they share with their students. However, without a forum for dialogue, movements towards more culturally appropriate approaches may not occur and this may restrict advances in English teaching development.

Opportunities for discussion will perhaps draw on and further develop Japanese experts in the area of language teaching. Encouraging JTEs to enhance their skills through professional development may encourage them to become authorities in their own right or at least reassure them that their experience is valuable. It is suggested that the JTEs will have a significant role in influencing and changing the existing educational infrastructure, something which Gillis-Furutaka (1994, pp. 33, 40) echoes.

One change which has occurred in Sendai has been the offering of seminars designed for JTEs only. These are delivered in English, and it is possible that the absence of AETs has led to more JTEs attending. However, although there has been some interest, with slightly over 10 JTEs present on each occasion, the attendance rates have not dramatically increased. A further step would be to conduct these sessions in Japanese. This has not occurred as yet, although during the JTE-only seminars there is Japanese language support from one of the Japanese teachers counselors from the IEG.

Another plan under consideration is to offer seminars at times when JTEs might better be able to attend. One possibility is to conduct seminars after school finishes, perhaps at 7 p.m. in the centrally-located Board of Education offices. Further options are to conduct intensive weekend sessions or intensive, multiple day workshops at times when schools are closed. However, as times at which schools are completely free of students in Japan are not frequent, scheduling such sessions will be complicated.

Requests have been made by JTEs for the IEG to ask school principals to require teachers to attend the seminars. This would mean that

attendance would not be a matter of choice for the JTEs, thus removing any stigma associated with leaving school early. Still, such a process may result in uninterested JTEs being forced to attend the seminars, and this may have adverse effects on the atmosphere in the workshops. Browne and Wada (1998) explored this issue through a survey conducted with teachers in Chiba prefecture and found that negative attitudes towards official seminars were possibly due to their mandatory nature (1998, p. 105). Therefore a system where the school administration requires seminar attendance may result in resistance to the program.

It is hoped that more feedback from the JTEs will be collected to clarify these issues. Suggestions and responses are often requested from teachers in Sendai but their reactions are not always forthcoming. As a result it is difficult to assess what changes the JTEs would like to see in the current program. A more active investigation of their ideas is required to thoroughly discover what format they would like professional development to take.

Conclusions

After 13 years the JET Program and its emphasis on team teaching continues to be supported and expanded by the Japanese government. Approval for the program comes from JTE participants themselves. Pattimore and Kobayashi (1999) reported that most of the JTEs surveyed in Ibaraki prefecture strongly defended the program, and exploratory unpublished research in Sendai by this author found many JTEs expressed similar rates of approval for the AET system and team teaching. However to justify the JET Program's existence and the vast expenditure of time, money and resources, educational authorities need to go beyond the present training and in-service training for JTEs and AETs. Concerns about English teaching in Japanese schools are constantly being raised, with the English-language press in Japan regularly detailing government and academic reports concerning this issue. A recent report stated that an advisory panel will be set up by the Monbusho "to discuss specific measures for the overhaul of English-teaching at schools and universities" ("Ministry set to review English teaching," 1999). The Education Minister "decided to set up the advisory panel to overhaul current teaching practices, in the belief that they are to blame for the lack of English-speaking proficiency." It was also stated that there would be a call for "new entrance examinations to be set up by high schools and universities, focusing mainly on students' ability to communicate in English." Although it is reassuring that concerns are being expressed about some of the matters raised in this

paper, it would be more gratifying to see some of these issues dealt with in a practical manner rather than simply being studied, discussed, and reported upon.

It is this writer's hope that there will be national support to put these changes into place. This support could be made manifest in the form of adequate teacher training and compulsory professional development. For English teaching and the JET Program to blossom into a truly effective system that offers Japanese students superior English education, further infrastructure needs to be introduced to streamline the working processes for the AETs and JTEs. While Sendai's program is not without its problems, it does provide a model for the Monbusho and other Boards of Education to consider.

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