

The JALT Story

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President

Those who first hear about JALT often ask about its origins. Just when and where did JALT begin? When does an idea take on substance?

Without entirely ignoring the contributions of our Japanese counterparts, I think it is still fair to say that, prior to 1975, there was very little meaningful cross-fertilization occurring among people in the EFL field in this country. Here and there, there were pockets of enthusiasm, but nobody really knew what anybody else was doing. And there was little or no input from outside Japan.

Sowing the Seed (1975)

Bill Harshbarger, then principal of LIOJ (Language Institute of Japan) in Odawara, announced a week-long TEFL conference in the spring of 1975. Underwhelmed by the response (five people registered), he retrenched and reannounced a scaled-down version of two days, to be held in August. Almost 40 people from all over Honshu gathered for this one. A great deal of excitement was generated, but, at a meeting on the second day, the majority decided *not* to channel their energies into forming a new organization at that time, but to revitalize the apparently languishing Foreign Teachers Association (FTAJ) in Tokyo, and to work through this already existing group to bring about changes in English education. Bill, in fact, pursued this commitment with some vigor and instituted a pre-dinner EFL Forum at FTAJ meetings, which enjoyed considerable success.

New Beginnings (1975)

Those of us from Kansai, however, were left with only the warm glow of our memories of the LIOJ Conference and a yearning to *do* something. Late that fall, Sharon Bode, then Chief Instructor at the Kyoto YMCA, made the first move by inviting a group of teachers to her apartment for lots of tea, cake, and good talk. I think those present at that first get-together will affirm that it seemed as if some void had been filled. There was almost a compulsive outpouring

of common experiences, ideas, book titles, and "solutions." It was apparent that something was happening. There were about 15 of us at that first meeting.

We didn't have a name yet, but it was agreed that subsequent meetings should center around an informal presentation or two. At our next gathering, Sharon spoke on the logic of pictures and I gave a brief demonstration of Silent Way Japanese. By the third meeting, we had outgrown Sharon's place and began our continuing nomadic existence, always on the lookout for a suitable meeting place.

KALT (1976)

A subsequent meeting was held at the National L.L. School in Osaka in the spring of 1976. After some discussion, those assembled decided to name the organization KALT. Further discussion was needed to determine whether KALT should stand for the Kansai Association of Language Teachers or the Kinki Association of Language Teachers. With the thought that the latter might invite misunderstanding, we decided on the former. It was also at that time that consideration was given to the nature of the organization. We determined *not* to limit ourselves to EFL teachers, or even to teachers, since we felt that the issues confronting teachers *and* learners of any language had much in common. There was also support for an approach to presentations which would be practical, concrete, and immediately useful, rather than abstract, theoretical, and/or academic.

TESOL '76

Sharon Bode, Bill Harshbarger, and I attended TESOL '76 in New York City. While there, Bill and I discussed plans for a similar all-Japan conference. During that trip, I became even more interested in the Silent Way. After we returned to Japan, a number of individuals expressed interest in having a Silent Way teacher from New York to do a workshop, and it soon became apparent that enough of us working together could pull it off. It was then that I realized that, if we could do this, we could do anything. If we could bring a teacher all the way from New York, we could bring one from anywhere. The desert could be made to bloom.

Sharon and Bill agreed that it would be best to couple the 50-hour workshop with a KALT-sponsored weekend conference, which we did in August of 1976. At that time, KALT had around 60 members, and about 120 people jammed the Kyoto YMCA for a weekend of intense activity. There were about 55 participants in the Silent Way Chinese workshop.

Kanto and Tokai Chapters (1977)

David Bycina, who had gained experience helping us in KALT, moved to Tokyo early in 1977 and, together with Doug Tomlinson, put together the Kanto ALT. With this move, JALT came into at least *de facto* existence, although the name of the organization did not change until later that year. Meanwhile, Charlie Adamson in Nagoya had gathered enough people to form the Tokai Chapter (TALT).

Recognition as the Official Japan Affiliate of TESOL (1977)

One of our major goals even when founding KALT had been that someday we would be recognized by TESOL as their first Asian affiliate. JALT's application was submitted in June and accepted in September.

TEFL '77 (Nagoya)

With 305 members and three chapters, JALT had shown its staying power. The TEFL Japan '77 conference held just outside of Nagoya in November 1977 was our first major gathering as JALT. Around 180 participants spent two days attending over 30 presentations and generating renewed enthusiasm.

Membership Growth (1978)

Early in 1978, the JALT Executive Committee, then consisting of Tom Pendergast (Executive Secretary), Doug Tomlinson (Treasurer), David Bycina (Program Chairman), Tom Robb (Membership Chairman), Charlie Adamson (Recording Secretary) and Nancy Nakanishi (Newsletter Editor), discussed ways of gaining new members, both individual and commercial. The consensus at that time was that the best strategy for increasing the membership was simply to do a good job at providing the people with what they want. In retrospect, this seems to have been the right stance to take.

The fact is that, in spite of almost no recruiting efforts worthy of the name, JALT grew during 1978 at a rate which was nearly alarming. The membership jumped from approximately 300 at the year's beginning to nearly 800 by its close, making JALT the third largest foreign affiliate of TESOL. Especially gratifying was the increase in the number of Japanese members. From an organization which was predominantly foreign at the outset, we balanced out in December at about 50-50.

Commercial membership, too, almost tripled. By the end of the year we had proved our worth to over 30 commercial members, among them some of the most respected publishing houses in the world.

New Chapters

As the membership spread throughout Japan, new chapters came into existence. Marie Tsuruda, Bonnie Hamm and Tim Lewis, respectively, took the lead in organizing JALT chapters in Hiroshima (Chugoku), Takamatsu (Shikoku), and Fukuoka (Nishi-Nippon), bringing the total of our affiliates to six. Thanks to our intrepid treasurer and Japan-hopper, Doug Tomlinson, the first moves towards organizing two more chapters in Tohoku and Hokkaido were begun.

Programs

In step with the rapid expansion of the organization, JALT's programming also took a giant step forward in 1978. One of the major highlights of the year was the visit of Dr. Caleb Gattegno, creator of the Silent Way. Gattegno, who treated us to over 70 hours of presentations in Kanto and Kansai, was followed by his assistant, Shioh Ley Kuo, who conducted a 9-day course in Mandarin Chinese in Kyoto. Song Young Ok provided the Chugoku and Tokai chapters with a weekend each of Silent Way Korean, and Dick Via, of English through Drama fame, came to Japan on a lecture tour sponsored jointly by JALT and the Language Institute of Japan.

LTIJ '78

The most ambitious undertaking of the year was our annual conference. Renamed Language Teaching in Japan, this year's program was cosponsored with the College Women's Association, a marriage which must have been made in heaven. JALT provided strength of numbers and professional expertise, while CWAJ amazed us with their organization, connections, and hard work. The result was a resounding success attended by over 400 participants, who had a choice of almost 70 presentations in two days.

At the business meeting held in conjunction with the conference, certain changes were made in the constitution. New categories of membership (joint and at-large) were approved, and the title of Executive Secretary was changed to President. A new office, Vice-President, was created in view of the expanding activities of the organization, and officers for 1979 were elected. These officers include: Tom Pendergast, (President), Tom Robb (Vice-President), Tim Lewis (Treasurer), Dave Hough (Program Chairman), Kohei Takubo (Recording Secretary), Doug Tomlinson (Membership Chairman), and David Bycina (Newsletter Editor).

Publications

The Newsletter, begun in October 1975, has gradually increased in both size and quality. Editor David Bycina started off 1979 with a new monthly edition, which has kept members informed of the activities in all of the chapters. The collected papers of reports on the presentations given at the Nagoya convention, entitled *TEFL Japan '77: Collected Papers*, edited by Mike Joy, was published last fall, and the second volume on last year's Tokyo convention has just been published. Finally, in November 1978, the *JALT Journal* was inaugurated, and makes its debut with this issue.

In terms of publications, programs, and the prospects for additional growth, the Japan Association of Language Teachers appears to have a bright future.

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JALT, the Japan affiliate of Tesol, is open to anyone interested in language teaching and learning. Membership provides 12 monthly newsletters, a journal, and reduced fees at JALT-sponsored workshops and the annual language-teaching conference. Local chapters provide meetings with guest speakers on a variety of topics related to language teaching and learning.

If you would like a brochure explaining more about membership in JALT, send your name and address to Doug Tomlinson, #401, 1-4-23 Higashi, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 150.

