

## TEAM-TEACHING IN JAPAN: THE KOTO-KU PROJECT

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### *Abstract*

This paper reports on a project which involves the use of native speaker teachers (NSTs) in English language classrooms in junior high schools in a ward of Tokyo. This project does not form part of the JET scheme,<sup>1</sup> but some of the experiences of the NSTs and Japanese teachers (JTs) over the first four years of the project may be of relevance to those working the JET scheme or in other team-teaching situations. The paper points out, amongst other things, the value of supportive organisation and the allocation of time for liaison between NSTs and JTs before teaching. There is also discussion of the roles that NSTs and JTs should adopt in the classroom; and reports of student and parent reactions to the project.

### 1. Introduction

The use of native speaker teachers (NSTs) in English language classrooms is becoming more and more widespread. The purpose of their introduction is both to improve listening and speaking and to promote the concept of internationalisation. However, when it comes to operating in the classroom, no one is sure how best to do this. Although broad outlines do exist, most Japanese teachers (JTs) and NSTs are still confused about how best to work together. This has led to wide variation in the practice of team-teaching in Japan from the ideal full and complete cooperation between the two teachers, to situations where the NST merely sits in a corner until s/he is asked to "model read" the text.

Team-teaching is new to most teachers in Japan and there are certain advantages to teachers learning from experience and developing their own style of team-teaching, but the overall lack of direction has made the prospect of team-teaching unpopular among some JTs and NSTs. Many teachers are understandably apprehensive about it and only a few teachers manage to realise its enormous potential. Team-teaching can be a powerful

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force for improving the level of spoken English in Japan, for increasing student interest and motivation, and it may, indirectly, influence "internationalisation".

The British Council Koto-ku Project, which has just completed its fourth year of team-teaching in junior high schools in Koto-ku (a ward in eastern Tokyo), differs from the general team-teaching situation in Japan in several important respects. It is not part of the JET scheme and consequently has slightly different aims, and therefore direct comparisons cannot be made. The organisation and teaching on the project is therefore quite different to most situations in Japan.

Over the four years of the project the changes that have taken place represent the process of learning how to team-teach in a way most appropriate to the first year of junior high school. What follows is a description of the project which highlights some of the features which now make (what we believe to be) a successful example of team-teaching.

It is worth emphasising at this stage that all developments and improvements have been made possible because of the enthusiasm of the Japanese teachers involved in the project, and the assistance of the principals of the schools and Koto-ku Education Board itself.

The success of any team-taught *lesson* depends ultimately on the personality and skills of the two teachers; however, the success of a team-teaching *project* depends on three important factors:

- a. having realistic and achievable aims
- b. having a supportive organisation
- c. matching teaching to the needs and abilities of the students

These three fundamental factors (*aims*, *organisation* and *teaching*) will serve as a framework for analysis and discussion of team-teaching both in Koto-ku and elsewhere in Japan.

## 2. The Aims of the Project

Originally the project had three main aims. These were

- a. To improve students' spoken English.
- b. To instil greater confidence in both listening and speaking.
- c. To introduce a new approach to language teaching and language learning.

As the project developed, the NSTs became more involved in the teaching of all four language skills at the request of the JTs, who feared that the

reading and writing skills of the students would deteriorate with such a concentration on speaking and listening, although speaking and listening are still the priorities.

### **3. The Organisation of the Project**

In January 1985, Koto-ku Education Board decided they would like to introduce NSTs into their schools. They therefore approached the British Council<sup>2</sup> for advice, and a pilot project was outlined. This was finally approved by an advisory committee made up of representatives of the Koto-ku Board of Education, the NSTs, and two distinguished Japanese ELT specialists, Prof. Katsuaki Togo of Waseda University and Prof. Yae Ogasawara (formerly) of Tsukuba University.

The British Council now supplies qualified and experienced NSTs to all 23 junior high schools in Koto-ku. There are approximately 120 first year classes a year, depending on annual intake, and each class receives a total of 15 team-taught lessons over a period of ten weeks. There are three English lessons a week, of which two are team-taught and one lesson is taught by the JT alone. One hour a week per teacher per school is set aside for liaison—the discussion of the lesson plan, contents, methodology, and the roles of the two teachers.

A series of ten workshops is also held between April and February at the Koto-ku Education Centre. These workshops focus on the practical teaching of the four skills in the prepared lessons and on language improvement. The workshops also provide a forum for discussion and evaluation of the scheme. The workshops give the JTs an opportunity to practise and develop their own language skills; this helps the JTs to communicate more effectively with the NSTs. The workshops have been invaluable in creating a spirit of cooperation, and in fostering personal and professional development for both JTs and NSTs.

### **4. The Teaching**

#### ***4.1 Planning***

The responsibility for the initial production and planning of the lessons lay with the British Council team. There were two main considerations in the design of the programme:

- a. That the lessons should encourage the students to use English in a meaningful and interesting way. The language learned had to be practical and immediately relevant to them. Also, the activities for

practising the language should be enjoyable for the students to increase the students' motivation. The programme should therefore generate students' interest in English and lead to a significant and, hopefully, measurable improvement in performance at the end of their studies.

- b. The programme was designed to fit in with the Mombusho guidelines for teaching English to first year students. The guidelines state that one of the three objectives of the study of First Grade English is "to enable the students to hear and speak on simple matters using primary English."

The guidelines also give the language items to be taught in the first year, which are included in the textbook prescribed by Mombusho for first year students (now *Sunshine 1*; in the first year of the project, *New Prince 1*). Lessons are developed around the key sentence for each page of the book using the starred vocabulary items as much as possible, but teaching the language in a communicative and enjoyable fashion.

#### 4.2 Activities

A wide range of activities is used in the lessons in Koto-ku, most of which involve the students working in pairs or groups in order to maximise the time the students are speaking and using English.

- a. Pairwork: where the students exchange information or ask and answer simple questions with a partner.
- b. Groupwork: where students work together in groups of 3, 4, or 5 to exchange information.
- c. Open class activities: such as "surveys" or "questionnaires" where students ask other students a simple question and note down their answers.
- d. Carefully constructed language activities in the form of games which are therefore interesting and motivating to the students.

#### 4.3 Materials

Many people blame the non-natural language of the textbooks for the poor level of English which students achieve. However, the textbooks do offer opportunities for realistic language transactions which can be easily exploited:

- |                         |   |                            |
|-------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| Do you have any...?     | - | brothers, sisters, pets.   |
| How many...do you have? | - | pens, brothers, cassettes. |

- |                      |   |                                       |
|----------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| Do you like...?      | - | cheese, natto, Hikaru Genji, Madonna. |
| What time do you...? | - | get up, have breakfast, get home.     |
| Can you...?          | - | swim, play the guitar, play shogi.    |

After the teachers have modelled these questions and asked them of each other, they practise them with the students, who then work in pairs, groups, or open class situations.

Even with less realistic language, creative teachers can find a situation to present the target language in a more authentic fashion. In this activity students have to find out which of a series of picture cards one of the teachers has chosen. First of all the teachers demonstrate:

- |       |                 |    |               |
|-------|-----------------|----|---------------|
| a. T1 | Is he swimming? | T2 | No, he isn't. |
| T1    | Is he .....?    | T2 | .....         |

until the correct card is described;

- |       |                     |    |                |
|-------|---------------------|----|----------------|
| b. T1 | Is she Japanese?    | T2 | No, she isn't. |
| T1    | Is she American?    | T2 | Yes, she is.   |
| T1    | Is she still alive? | T2 | Yes, she is.   |
| T1    | Is she famous?      | T2 | Yes, she is.   |

until the correct person is described.

(Note that T1 and T2 are used here to denote either teacher.)

Using the language in the textbook in such a way over the last four years has resulted in the creation of a bank of materials which includes ideas and activities from both the Japanese and British Council teachers. For examples see Sturman and Brumby (1986), and the British Council Koto-ku booklets (British Council, 1987, 1988).

The materials are designed to be student-centred so that the students can talk about things that are directly relevant to them: their family, routines, hobbies, likes and dislikes, abilities. This increases the students' interest in the language by making it more immediate to them.

All of the above activities have proved to be useful ways of allowing the students to use the language realistically. However, such activities need very careful planning and preparation for the students to be able to carry them out effectively and with confidence. The lesson needs to be conducted in a series of stages, each of which enables the students to do a little more with the language so that they can eventually cope with an "open" transaction where they are working independently of the teachers. A general principle is "reception before production" or, in computer terminology, "input before output". We have found that it is essential for the students to listen to language before they are required to produce it; therefore extensive listening

practice takes place in the first four stages of the lesson followed by intensive drilling of both vocabulary and structure.

#### *4.4 Stages of the Lesson*

In Koto-ku lesson plans, the following stages are recognised for most lessons:

- Stage 1: Introduction and drilling of new vocabulary.
- Stage 2: Listening exercise using new (and reviewed) vocabulary to check student comprehension and retention.
- Stage 3: Introduction of structure/transaction. Listening exercise based on JT/NST exchange.
- Stage 4: Drilling of target language. Backchaining, choral repetition.
- Stage 5: Practice exercise based on stages 1, 3, and 4. Students working in pairs, groups, or open class situations using the target vocabulary and grammar.
- Stage 6: Extension activities. Possibly a reading or writing exercise, or reference to the textbook.

At the beginning of the Koto-ku Project, many of the lesson plans prepared by the British Council team were correctly criticised by the JTs for including vocabulary that the students did not know (or need to know) or for exercises that were too complicated for the students (and, more importantly, the JTs) to fully understand. The lessons which we now teach are simple and directly relevant to the students, the activities are not too complicated and the level of English is, with the aid of the JTs, precisely targeted at the students' level of English. We cannot expect the students to use structures and vocabulary that they do not know.

#### *4.5 Teacher roles*

Three main types of team-teaching can be recognised:

- a. two (or more) teachers teaching the same students at the same time.
- b. separate lessons on the same subject by teachers with different perspectives or approaches.
- c. alternate teaching of a course which has been jointly planned and prepared.

In Koto-ku, and in Japan generally, the first type is the accepted norm, although there are examples of the other two types.

Where students only see an NST once or twice, JTs often think that the students should "make the most" of this rare opportunity and that the NST

should dominate the lesson. This is not, in our opinion, the best idea for the following reasons:

- a. It is important that the students respect their Japanese teacher, and therefore the relationship between the JT and NST in the classroom must show the students that both teachers are equally responsible and capable.
- b. It is valuable that the students believe that their JT's English is good, so both teachers should be equally responsible for pronunciation drilling. If the JT makes a mistake during the lesson, it should only be pointed out to him or her if it affects the lesson. Even in such a situation, it must be done without making the teacher look bad in front of their students. A piece of paper on the teacher's desk at the front where any mistakes can be silently written and pointed out, and a light-hearted check on pronunciation before the lesson, can save a lot of unnecessary embarrassment.
- c. It is essential that the Japanese teacher be fully aware of the purpose of and procedure for any language exercise so that she or he can be equally responsible for initiation and explanation of listening and speaking exercises, pairwork, groupwork, and open class exercises.

Both teachers, therefore, should stand at the front of the class; both teachers should be equally involved in all stages of the lesson; both teachers should be equally responsible for initiation, drilling, pronunciation, explanation, monitoring, and checking. Neither teacher should ever feel the need to sit down or hide at the back of the class. Such classes need considerable effort and preparation and require the two teachers to work together closely both before the lesson and during it. Before the lesson the teachers should carefully check that they know exactly what they are going to do, who is going to say what and when, and what the students are expected to do. Teaching is often like theatre, and in the case of team-teaching the script and stage directions must be rehearsed and memorised carefully.

The goodwill of the JTs and their fullest possible participation in the classroom, the workshops, and in the preclass discussion is essential to the success of the Koto-ku scheme. Ideally the JT contributes to the lessons in three ways:

- a. Before the lesson, in the workshops and in the liaison time, the JT suggests adjustments, changes, and alteration to the lesson plan to fit the needs of the particular classes to be taught and informs the NST of any problem students or slow learners.

- b. During the lessons, the teachers should share the teaching so completely that it would be difficult for an observer to tell who was leading the class. This means that both teachers are responsible for of initiation, pronunciation drilling, explanation, modelling, organisation, and monitoring of the students. A lesson with these features is, of course, an ideal, but it is the standard which the teachers aim to achieve.
- c. After the lesson, the JT provides valuable feedback about the success the lesson, the students' reaction to it, and ways in which it could be improved.

The cooperation between the teachers is seen as the most positive feature of the project, although the degree of involvement varies from teacher to teacher according to personality and degree of confidence.

## 5. Evaluation

The students' reaction to the project has been very positive. There has been a significant increase in the students' interest in and enjoyment of English. In one Koto-ku school, the students were polled (by the JT) to test their reaction to the possibility of having team-taught lessons in the second year. All the students (except two) actively wanted this. Team-teaching has also encouraged many students who believed they were poor at English to catch up with the other students. A full analysis of the students' response to the team-taught lessons is currently under way with all students in Koto-ku completing a simple questionnaire.

It has never discouraged a student. It has also encouraged parents to take a more active interest in their children's English education. There have often been ten or more parents at the back of an open day class, and their opinions have been very positive. Most wish that they themselves had had the opportunity to study English in such a way, and some even ask if it is possible to join the classes. The students are also fascinated by any sort of by-play between the teachers. It is an opportunity for them to see, at first hand, how a Japanese person and a person from abroad can get along together, something they can only usually see on the television in a highly artificial situation. The personal relationship between the teachers helps the students to see that speaking in English can be fun and also that it can't be all that difficult. The students also have the opportunity to use English themselves: with the NST, with the JT, and other students in the class. For the students this is the first and maybe the only time that they are able to "have a con-



versation" with someone from abroad, in English, about things that are important to them: their likes and dislikes, their daily routines, hobbies, pets, family, favourite pop stars, and sports stars.

There has been a marked increase in student listening and speaking abilities. In one junior high school 100% of those students who took the new Step 5 examination passed, 96% in another school. In this new examination, 50% of the marks are allocated to listening skills, and all of the Koto-ku students scored significantly high on this part. This cannot be directly attributed to the project, but, nonetheless, everyone involved felt that the team-teaching and the type of lessons that were taught must have played a significant, if unquantifiable role.

Less directly, team-teaching has helped to eliminate some of the many misconceptions held about "foreigners", and to project a more positive image of foreign teachers, and "foreigners" in general, both in the school and in the local community.

## 6. Conclusion

The Koto-ku Project is an example of how Japanese teachers and native speaker teachers can work together within the framework of the existing educational system. Although the final aim of schools is to prepare students for entrance examinations which do not currently test communicative competence, there are signs that the focus of these examinations will change towards the testing of listening and speaking skills. The Koto-ku Project is helping teachers and students prepare for any such change of focus and is, moreover, helping to produce students who not only understand the grammar of English, but can also use the language to communicate reasonably successfully in English. The Koto-ku Project indicates that team-teaching can be a success and should therefore encourage teachers throughout Japan to see the positive side of working with their opposite numbers as there is so much potential benefit for the students.

## Notes

1. The JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) programme began in 1987 following the success of other implant teaching projects in Japan. In 1988, approximately 1,300 AETs (Assistant English Teachers) from the USA, UK, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Ireland arrived in Japan to work alongside Japanese teachers of English in public junior and senior high schools. The programme is expected to expand and has generated considerable professional and public debate about the nature of language teaching and learning.
2. The British Council is active in some 80 countries around the world promoting the teaching of English and developing contracts between Britain and countries abroad in science, arts, and culture. The Council operates about 50 language teaching institutes in 40 different countries and is also closely involved with various English language teaching projects within public educational systems.

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