TEAM-TEACHING IN JAPAN
A Short Description of Some Typical Activities

Not Every Situation is Completely Different!
That’s right – you heard it here first! While there are indeed a wide variety of situations, and an even wider variety of Japanese Teachers of English, there are also many aspects of teaching as an ALT that seem to follow certain patterns. While there are countless different styles of team-teaching, every class you will be asked to assist with can probably be placed somewhere on the following sliding scale, based on the overall goals of the lesson.

The Team-Teaching Continuum

A typical “Personal/Cultural” lesson will either focus on you, the ALT, or it will examine interesting aspects of your home country/culture. These lessons aim to broaden cultural understanding and develop interest, and do not necessarily target new grammar or vocabulary. Your introduction lesson, in which you meet the students, answer questions, and perhaps run a simple activity will probably be an example of this type of class.

A “Textbook” lesson, as the name implies, is one in which the goal of the class is to complete activities in the students’ textbooks. In these classes, your job may be simply reciting words or sentences for the students to repeat, after which you head back to the sidelines while the JTE provides further explanation. However, depending on the specific activity and your own Japanese abilities, you may be asked to take a more active role.

Finally, between these two extremes lies a wide range of potential activities which utilize both your presence as a native speaker and the language goals set by the textbook to inspire and teach certain aspects of English. In other words, these lessons turn the current grammar and vocabulary goals into cool activities that utilize your presence as a native speaker of English.

Some Examples
Let’s take a look at some example lessons in each category.

Personal/Cultural: The Self-Introduction (自己紹介 jiko-shoukai)
This will be one of your first major tasks as the new (or first!) ALT in your schools – introducing yourself to the students in a fun and interactive way. Although most JTEs will already have ideas for how this should be done, there is a very good chance that they will ask (or hope) that you can bring an activity of your own to help the students get to know you. Two activities that worked well for me were “Question Cards” and “Personal Quiz”. Feel free to use these ideas or develop something new!
Of course, each teacher will have an English textbook and curriculum provided by their school district. Depending on their personal views, they may or may not be very invested in completing that textbook. If you happen to be working with a teacher who wants the students to complete every activity in the book before the year is out, expect to assist in many classes based on those textbook activities.

Interactive Language Learning: “What Do You Like” Bingo

Ok, first of all, be forewarned: bingo is pretty much an educational cliché in many English classrooms in Japan. By the end of my second year as an ALT, the very mention of bingo would send me into convulsions of overdosed agony on the floor. That being said, it never failed to inspire my middle school students (although the 3rd year kids did show early signs of over-saturation). Use in high schools at your own discretion/risk. This particular bingo game involves two parts – first, students walk around asking their classmates what kinds of things they like using the “What ~ do you like?” pattern. The classmates answer using one of the five choices available in each category, and if it’s blank, the first student can write their classmate’s name on the line. After a set time limit, students return to their seats to play bingo. The teachers choose a student’s name at random, and anyone with that name on their sheet can write an X on it. For extra practice, that student can then be asked another “What ~ do you like” question.

Closing Notes – How to Contribute to Lesson Planning

In the beginning, chances are you will not have much choice about which style of lesson you will be helping with on any particular day. Your first classes will probably all be self-introduction, but after that, it really does depend on your teachers and situation. Some of you will be working with teachers whose style is very cooperative and active, and you will have little or no trouble contributing to the planning and implementation of activities. But what if you find yourself always in one particular role, and would like to suggest a new activity? Perhaps you are relegated to the role of occasional game-leader, and never get a chance to participate in actual lessons. Or perhaps your JTE is quite fond of the textbook, and uses you only to provide model reading. Here are a few tips for suggesting new activities to your JTEs:

Develop Rapport and Demonstrate Responsibility – Almost goes without saying, but deserves mention due to its importance. Cultivate a relationship of mutual respect with your JTEs, and everything gets better. Come to work on time. Finish tasks that are asked of you. Be appropriate with your students. These things will go a long way to earning your JTE’s trust.

Watch and Learn – Observe your JTE to see how they handle the class. Even if it’s a different style than your own, there are sure to be things you can absorb and use.

Make a Thorough Lesson Plan – When you have an idea for a new lesson, write up a proposed schedule for the class. Include a full description of each part, including basics such as warm-up activities and time for explanation. Also include an estimate of how much time each activity should take. (You might see examples of this when your JTE talks to you about upcoming classes.) This kind of preparation and professionalism will help your JTE understand your goals for the class and also demonstrate your awesome lesson-creation skills.

Be Patient – It can sometimes take awhile for JTEs to develop trust in their ALT’s lesson planning abilities. If they seem hesitant, use your free time at school to further develop your lesson plan or work on a new one. Watch, learn, and keep your enthusiasm high. Chances are that your time will come, so make sure you are ready!
Samples and Ideas

**Question Cards**

This self-introduction tool was introduced to me by another JET in my area, and it served as a reliable staple for me throughout my teaching years. The great strengths of this lesson lie in its flexibility and interactivity – varying the difficulty of the questions can make it effective for just about any speaking level, and it keeps students active and involved by making them a part of your own self-introduction.

**The Cards:** Before your lesson, prepare a small deck of numbered cards with questions in English. These questions will be answered by you, and should be phrased using basic sentence structures and simple vocabulary. The exact level of the questions will depend on your students’ grade and abilities – checking with your JTE in advance is recommended. Of course, it would also be wise to tailor the questions to your own background, hobbies, and personal features. 😊 You will need at least half as many cards as there are students in the class.

**The Intro:** When your time has come, tell the class that you would like to introduce yourself, but that you need some help. If they are not already in pairs, ask them to find a partner. Give one question card to each pair. Explain that one student in each pair must ask you the question so that you can answer it. The other partner must then be prepared to answer that same question from you after you have finished answering it yourself. *(If you are using a “Wild Card”, be sure to explain it at the beginning so that the students have a chance to think of a good question!)*

**The Activity:** Starting with card #1 (which will probably be something like “What is your name?”), go through each of the questions. The pair with card #1 stands up, one student asks you the question on the card, and you answer that question. Then you ask the same question to the other student before the pair gets to sit down. After a few rounds of slow coaching, they should get the hang of this. Of course, a key part of this activity is your own presentation of the answers – props such as maps, photos, and other interesting objects will help to make your introduction memorable!

**Some Question Ideas:**

- What is your name?
- Where are you from?
- When is your birthday?
- How old are you?
- How many brothers and sisters do you have?
- What ~ do you like?
- Can you ~?
- Do you like ~?
- WILD CARD! (Student can ask any question they wish!)

These questions are geared towards the typical middle school English class. They can be made more challenging for higher level classes, or they may include pronunciation guides and translations for lower level classes.
"Who's Will Porter?"

1. Age
a) 23  b) 24  c) 25  d) 26

2. Hometown
a) Chicago  b) Seattle  c) Portland  d) Gresham

3. Birthday
a) January 2nd  b) June 7th  c) July 14th  d) October 22nd

4. Brothers
a) 0  b) 1  c) 2  d) 3  e) 4

5. Sisters
a) 0  b) 1  c) 2  d) 3  e) 4

6. Pets (2)
a) cat  b) dog  c) bird  d) rabbit  e) hamster

7. Hobbies (3)
a) piano  b) karaoke  c) skiing  d) snowboarding  e) guitar

8. Favorite Sport
a) American football  b) basketball  c) baseball  d) soccer

9. Favorite Baseball Team
a) Seattle Mariners  b) New York Yankees  c) Yomiuri Giants

10. Favorite Restaurant
a) McDonald's  b) KFC  c) Tonton Kaiten-zushi

11. Favorite color
a) red  b) yellow  c) green  d) blue

12. Japan arrival
a) March 1, 2001  b) August 5, 2001  c) February 25, 2002

13. Japanese music
a) Mikidozan  b) GLAY  c) Da Pump  d) Morning Musume

14. English music
a) Backstreet Boys  b) Carpenters  c) U2

15. Movie (2)
a) Al  b) The Matrix  c) Princess Mononoke  d) Titanic

16. Umeboshi
a) ok  b) yuck!

17. Natto-maki
a) ok  b) yuck!

18. Uni
a) ok  b) yuck!
Kenta: Look! The sea is beautiful!
Aki: Can you see the people in the water?
Nick: No, I can’t. Where?
Aki: Over there.
Nick: Oh, I see them.
Kenta: Some people surf even in winter.
Aki: Nick, can you surf?
Nick: Yes, I can. But I don’t surf in winter.
“What ~ do you like?”

例  A: What **food** do you like?  
    B: I like **ramen**.  
    A: Thank you!

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