

# Five Steps to Creating an Effective Team-teaching Relationship

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## Introduction

In Japan, team teaching with a native English teacher and a Japanese teacher has become a common way of conducting EFL classes in high schools and junior high schools. However, not all team teaching relationships are as satisfactory as they could be. So, what is the best way to create a good team-teaching relationship between the Assistant Language Teachers (ALT) and Japanese teacher? Here are some ideas you can try.

## Step 1: Exchange Emails

Contact the other to make sure both teaching partners understand the curriculum and the specific goal of the upcoming class. If you are a Japanese teacher, email the ALT at least a day before the class to describe the expected learning outcomes and the lesson plan. Leave the lesson plan flexible enough to incorporate any ideas the ALT may have. If you are an ALT, don't hesitate to send an email first to ask information about the upcoming lesson. By exchanging ideas before the lesson, both of you are actively working to create a co-participant stance that will help foster a more satisfactory approach to cooperative class management.

## Step 2: Talk for Five Minutes Before Class

As an ALT or a Japanese teacher, bring your ideas along with the lesson plan to school. Take five minutes to talk to each other before class. You can ask the following questions:

1. What are the students expected to achieve through today's class?
2. What kinds of activities are they going to do? Are the materials suitable for today's lesson?
3. What are the specific roles of each member of the teaching team?

If you are an ALT, you can offer your ideas to the Japanese teacher by using phrases such as:

1. I like your idea of doing a dialogue in class, but what do you think if...
2. I have brought some materials with me; I think they will help the students to acquire some expressions while playing these games.

There is no necessity to stay with the original plan if you come up with new ideas that sound more attractive. Five minutes is not a long time, but the talk creates a shared understanding of the class and can keep both of you on the same page.

## Step 3: Display Your Trust

Trust the other's ability in the class and display your trust in action. If you are the Japanese teacher, try to avoid giving requests directly, such as "Please read the paragraph" or "Please ask the students questions", because these can sound like direct orders, which might make the ALT feel like he or she is being treated as a CD player. Instead you can use implicit methods such as a gaze or body languages to invite the other to take the next action or you can just wait to offer your teaching partner a chance to take active actions. An experienced ALT will have the ability to judge when to commence an activity, and where to take action. If you really need to prompt the other teacher, try using phrases such as, "Jenny, would you like to say that in

English for us?” or “Matthew, can we get you to show us how to make that sound?” This will help the ALT to feel like a valued member of the team. Framing your directions as requests or invitations will also provide the students with important pragmatic awareness.

If you work as an ALT, display your trust of the Japanese teacher through actively participating in the class. Don't act as a robot waiting for orders. Observe the class to see where and what kind of action needs to be taken. Remember good cooperation is co-established through how you perform in the class.

## Step 4: Make Small Talk

Between lessons, usually there is a ten-minute break. Of course you could choose to be by yourself during this time, but you can also use these ten minutes as a good opportunity to establish a closer rapport with your teaching partner.

Here are some topics you could use.

### **Talk about what is happening in the classes.**

Class related topics contain at least two advantages. First, reflecting on the class can help you come up with ways to modify the lesson plan, as well as promote cooperation for the coming class. Second, talking about something you have in common can establish a sense of membership, which therefore creates better teamwork.

### **Talk about culture or language related topics.**

As a native speaker of either English or Japanese, you might find that there are some interesting aspects of your teaching partner's way of life that he or she can teach you about. For ALT's, this can be an important way of getting to know about the world around you. For Japanese teachers, talking about the ALT's home country can broaden your knowledge of English teaching cultures.

### **Talk about hobbies or interests.**

Hobbies such as listening to music or watching movies can be used as resources in the classroom conversations. The more information you know about each other, the more resources you can apply to teaching.

Well-chosen topics will help establish a closer rapport with each other, and therefore it will foster a better atmosphere of cooperation. The more familiar you are with each other, the better and more effective the lesson will be.

## Step 5: After Class, Write Your Reflections

After the class, take two minutes to write down your reflections about the lesson. It could be observations, thoughts or feelings; anything about the class. If you think the team-teaching didn't go well, try to think about where you felt it needed work, or about when the other person seemed uncomfortable and why. Send emails to your teaching partner to discuss the class. Express your ideas honestly but politely. Respecting each other's job and speaking from a team stance will contribute to the development of the team teaching as well as your own personal development as a language teacher. The last thing you need to do is to keep your mind open to any suggestions.

## Conclusion

These five steps are practical tips. The most important thing is to remember that a good cooperation is co-established through interactions both in and out of the class. Displaying your position and being sensitive to that of your teaching partner will result in the establishment of an effective teaching team.