An examination of the perspectives of five Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) regarding their dual roles as English language teachers and purveyors of internationalization in Japan

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ABSTRACT

An examination of the perspectives of five Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) regarding their dual roles as English language teachers and purveyors of internationalization in Japan

Joseph Allen

This qualitative study examines the field experience of Canadian Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) hired by the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program to teach in high schools across Japan, in order to shed some light on the role expectations of the teachers and the true impacts of the program. The focus is on providing ALTs with a voice through which their unique perspectives can be revealed. Five ALTs who had recently completed their assignments with the JET program were interviewed on their experience regarding their dual roles as assistant language teachers and cultural ambassadors, and on their roles in the Japanese workplace in general. Research participants were recruited from the greater Montreal area. The interviews were transcribed and the resulting narratives were examined for emerging themes. This analysis was complemented by the author's first-hand experience as a former JET participant. Results reveal that positive relationships between ALTs and their Japanese co-workers are essential to their successful performance in the workplace and for a smooth acculturation process for both sides. Findings contribute to the current limited body of research into ALT perceptions and debunk the notion that only native speakers can or should be considered for recruitment as ALTS, thus opening pathways for further research in this area of growing importance with rapid internationalization and globalization.

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The challenges I faced throughout the thesis writing process were numerous: accepting an unexpected job offer by Youth Fusion, a non-profit organization that aims to counter high school dropout rates by engaging at-risk youth, resulted in the extension of my original six-month timeframe; the task of balancing my responsibilities as a *Northern Leadership Project Coordinator* with my research was not an easy one.

I can remember late nights spent transcribing interviews by my kitchen window, looking out at the bone chilling winter storms of Waskaganish, and anticipating the long list of responsibilities that required my attention over the weeks to come. As my six-month contract with Youth Fusion neared its end, I was offered a full-time teaching position at the local Cree high school. While I knew that this opportunity would further delay the completion of my study, I felt it was an experience I could not pass up.

I want to thank the students at Wiinibekuu School for reminding me that it's never too late to pursue your dreams and that the path to success, however tedious and difficult it may seem, is one that we must walk with determination. I hope that they will all take this lesson to heart in the years to come. I believe that they are capable of great things.

It was thanks to the continuous support of my wife, Megu, that I was able to balance my teaching duties with my research and writing. Not only did she leave behind her friends and family in Japan, she also agreed to travel to the distant Canadian North to live and work by my side. Her insights into the Japanese mentality kept my interest in her homeland alive, and served as the anchor to my past experience with JET. Without her, the completion of this paper would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank my wonderful parents for their ongoing faith in my abilities and for the emotional and financial support they have provided throughout my academic career. I love them dearly.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Terms Employed

ALT: Assistant Language Teacher
CIR: Coordinator for International Relations
EIL: English as an International Language
ELT: English Language Teacher
Enkai: Japanese word for drinking party
ESL: English as a Second Language
Gaijin: Japanese word for foreigner
Honyaku: Japanese word for translation
JET: Japan Exchange and Teaching
Jikoshyoukai: Japanese term for self-introduction
JTE: Japanese Teacher of English
LET: Local English Teacher
MEXT: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology
MOFA: Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NET: Native English Teacher
Nihonjinron: Japanese word for theories on Japanese distinctiveness
Obon: Japanese festival honoring family ancestors
SEA: Sports Exchange Advisor
Sensei: Japanese word for teacher
TEFL: Teaching English as a Foreign Language
Teshyoku: Japanese word for a form of traditional Japanese cuisine
TESL: Teaching English as a Second Language

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Chapter One: Introduction

I stepped off of the plane at Komatsu Airport into the sweltering July heat and walked across the airport runway. It was my first day in Japan. Dressed in a pinstripe suit, and toting a leather briefcase, I looked the part of a foreign language teacher, prepared for the journey ahead. Despite my lack of sleep, my sweat-soaked shirt and my inability to speak the Japanese language, I was eager to begin my first day on the job. Stepping through the arrival gates, I was greeted by my supervisor and the chief of Tsubasa's Board of Education as well as the local Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) and Assistant Language Teacher (ALT). Bowing awkwardly, I sputtered the customary greetings I had rehearsed in my poor Japanese.

The day was a whirlwind of firsts: my first *teshyoku* (traditional Japanese cuisine), my first attempts at communication with native Japanese speakers, my first time meeting the local mayor at the Tsubasa town hall, my first time at the Tsubasa Board of Education, and my first experience of what it means to be a *gaijin* (i.e., foreigner) in Japan. I felt like a star. That is, until I met my Japanese co-workers for the first time.

Tsubasa Minami Chyugakkou is a small junior high-school in semi-rural Japan with a student body of roughly 500 students. It lies 5 minutes inland from the West coast of Ishikawa Prefecture, surrounded by rice paddies, crop fields, and small houses stacked with traditional tiled roofs that catch the glint of the bright sun and repel the heavy, wet

snow of Ishikawa's damp winters. This is where I would spend the next three years of my adult life.

When I stepped through the sliding doors of the staffroom I was greeted by a chorus of *oohs* and *ahs*. Everyone began to clap enthusiastically. I bowed and waved as I was ushered into the principal's office. Two Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) sat at the opposite side of a long oak table and smiled politely as they stood to welcome me. After bowing and introducing myself, I took a seat and opened my notebook. I was informed that I would be teaching at Tsubasa Minami Junior High three out of five workdays per week and that the JTEs were in the process of drafting out my class schedule, which I would receive the following day. On Thursdays and Fridays, I would alternate between four local elementary schools. I remember being impressed by the JTEs' English. They spoke with heavy accents, but we had no problem communicating with each other. They described my role in the classroom as an assistant teacher and briefly explained what would be expected of me in the weeks to come. I communicated my enthusiasm and promised to contribute to the education of my students to the best of my abilities.

As the meeting came to a close, an awkward silence fell over the room. The teachers exchanged nervous glances, and one of them hesitantly asked if I had any prior teaching experience. Slightly embarrassed, I explained that, save for private English tutoring in my days as an undergraduate at Concordia University, I did not. They seemed disappointed. I tried to reassure them by communicating my eagerness to learn from them, and to assume the role of apprentice. They seemed somewhat reassured, but after another period of silence, the teacher to my left shyly asked if I could speak Japanese. I

awkwardly explained that I had begun studying the language when I heard news of my acceptance by the JET Program, only three months prior to my arrival in Japan. Beyond simple greetings, I did not know the language. I could not help feeling that they were dismayed, despite their bright smiles and reassurance that they were happy to have me onboard.

I left the school perturbed, but tried to remain optimistic as the CIR explained that my supervisor would drive me to my new apartment, where I could unpack and relax for the rest of the evening. My workday was finally over. Alone in my new home, which was empty save for a thin futon and blanket folded neatly on the floor of my bedroom, I sat against the wall and wondered where I had gone wrong. It was only two days ago, at the Tokyo orientation session that a representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) had emphasized that ALTs should not use Japanese in the classroom and that we were specifically selected by the program for our native English speaking abilities. In fact, according to the representative, our inability to speak Japanese was considered an asset by JET officials. I wondered why the teachers had asked me if I had any teaching experience and why they seemed disappointed when I explained that I did not. As far as I knew, my background had been provided to my school by my contracting organization. Why hadn't the teachers been informed of my credentials? I remembered having read that teaching experience was unnecessary when applying to teach with JET. Why did the teachers consider such experience to be important? These were just a few of the questions which I would attempt to answer throughout my three years teaching English in semi-rural Japan.

When I left Japan, I had acquired new perspectives on teaching English as an international language. Many of these perspectives were influenced by the cultural differences I faced throughout my time as an ALT and by my positive and negative experiences trying to teach English without any former training. As I embarked upon a new phase of my life, enrolled in the graduate Educational Studies program at Concordia University, I was still intrigued by the obstacles I faced in the Japanese workplace. In hindsight, I realized that I was not entirely prepared for my own JET experience. I was not equipped with all of the tools necessary to successfully educate my Japanese students. While I felt confident in my role as a cultural ambassador my lack of training seemed to compromise my position as an assistant English language teacher.

Research Questions

Many of the obstacles mentioned above suggest problems within the structure of the JET Program. Therefore, I chose to examine the JET experience for my MA thesis research project. As a former ALT, I would like to assist the JET Program by attempting to shed light on the role of ALTs in junior high schools across Japan.

Throughout my JET experience, some of my Japanese co-workers expected me to convey grammar points to the students. Others were dismissive of my attempts to do so, preferring that I talk about my experiences as a Canadian living abroad. I was frequently confused and often wondered which aspect of my job should take precedence. In light of these experiences, my study will address the following research question: In what ways does the dual nature of the ALT's job description affect the practice of English instruction in junior high schools across Japan? Sub-questions are: In what way do ALTs contribute to the learning environment in Japanese classrooms? Are ALTs equipped with

the tools necessary to meet the goals outlined for them by JET? Are they, in fact, effective as English language teachers? Is the training offered by JET during the pre-departure period sufficient? Do ALTs with prior teaching experience have more positive experiences with JET? Is the native speaker myth perpetuated by JET a necessary component in the recruitment process?

In the pages that follow, I will address the JET Program's definition of the term ALT. I will also investigate the roles of ALTs as both assistant teachers of English and promoters of internationalization. I will write primarily from the perspective of my experience in the JET Program, but my research will be useful to similar language programs across East Asia. As very little research has focused on the perspectives of ALTs I feel that it is necessary to understand EIL instruction in Japan from their point of view. Crump (2007), a former JET participant and McGill graduate, has been one of the few to focus on the perspectives of former ALTs, and her study served as the springboard to my investigation.

Statement of the Problem

When seeking to gain insight into international exchange programs such as the JET Program, it is important that researchers pay close attention to the perceptions of stakeholders most directly involved in the fulfillment of the program's goals, namely, those of ALTs. As previously mentioned, many of the obstacles faced by ALTs reveal problems within the structure of the JET Program. As a former ALT, I would like to assist the JET Program by attempting to shed light on the roles of untrained ALTs in junior high schools across Japan. By investigating ALTs' perspectives regarding their perceptions of the JET Program, of their roles as assistant English teachers and cultural

ambassadors, and of their general job satisfaction within the Japanese workplace, I hope to provide stakeholders and policy makers with valuable insight that might assist them in developing and successfully fulfilling JET mandates.

In my study, I will discuss the dual nature of the ALT's job description and the way that conflicting elements of this description can affect the practice of English instruction in Japanese junior high schools. Research into the perspectives of ALTs is scarce. As ALTs are the primary disseminators of native English in Japan, it is important to investigate their perceptions of their roles as assistant language teachers and purveyors of foreign culture.

Operational Definitions of Key Terms

As discrepancies exist in the terms employed by academics that have contributed to the current body of research into the JET Program, I will begin by clarifying my own use of these terms. In past studies exploring the roles of JET participants hired for their native English proficiency, the acronym English Language Teacher (ELT) has occasionally been used instead of the acronym ALT in order to account for the relatively small percentage of JET participants who assist in the instruction of languages other than English (e.g., French, German, Korean, etc.) However, within the context of the Japanese workplace, JET training sessions and discussions between immediate stakeholders, the term ALT is most commonly used to describe assistant English teachers employed by JET. Thus, when I refer to ALTs, I am referring to assistant English teachers hired by the JET Program. Similarly, Japanese Teachers of English (JTEs) are often called Local English Teachers (LETs) or lead teachers, but I will refer to them as JTEs throughout my thesis.

The English language was introduced into classrooms across Japan with the aim of internationalizing its students; through English language learning and exposure to native speaker models, Japanese Youth would be granted the opportunity to practice their oral communication skills, and improve their English. It was hoped that the native English teachers' presence would promote and deepen mutual international understanding through the cooperation of ALTS and local citizens in Japan (Galloway, 2009). Because of this background I will employ the term English as an International Language (EIL) as opposed to the commonly used English as a Second Language (ESL) when referring to English language learning in Japan.

Literature Review

The JET Program

The Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program is a government program, financed and run jointly by the Japanese Ministries of Education, Home Affairs, and Foreign Affairs (Browne & Wada, 1998). It is the largest program of its kind and was introduced by the Japanese government in 1987 to promote and deepen mutual international understanding through the cooperation between native, mostly English speaking ALTs and Japanese people, as well as, through the ALTs, in helping to improve the communicative English ability of Japanese students. (Galloway, 2009)

The program includes the recruitment of ALTs who assist in foreign language teaching in high schools, CIRs who assist with projects related to international activities carried out by local governments and also SEAs who assist in sports training.

Before the introduction of the JET Program, no foreigners were allowed to teach in Japanese public schools. It is not surprising that ALTs hired by the JET Program were welcomed with a certain degree of trepidation and uncertainty. While the JET Program is

meant to be an international exchange program that promotes positive intercultural relations with the West, it is also a program created to expand the influence of Japan throughout the world.

According to Lai (2010), the Japanese government has not shown genuine concern about the effectiveness of the program on language improvement. Galloway (2009) also holds that the success of the JET Program on foreign language study is questionable and that no official evaluation of the JET Program's effect on English language study has been conducted to date. While the program's primary goal is that of internationalization, Galloway (2009) claims that there is a strong possibility the JET program will create 'mass Americanization' as opposed to 'mass internationalization' (p. 197). This is due to the heavy reliance on ALTs who are native speakers of English, hailing from inner circle countries. Clearly, the JET Program has a lot of potential to educate students in a variety of ways, although many improvements are needed (Galloway, 2009).

In order to understand the JET program's *raison d'être*, it is important to explore Japan's history as it relates to the Western world. Through his historical work, Henshall (2004) provides us with insight into the Japanese mentality and the ways in which the concept of *nihonjinron* (i.e., theories on Japanese distinctiveness) and *kokusaika* (i.e., internationalization) came into being. Faced with a need to present an internationalist identity that would not compromise its own, Japan sought to strengthen its relations with the United States by opening its doors to foreign workers; the JET Program was its primary method of doing so.

Suzuki and Oiwa (1997) trace the development of Japan as it relates to the West,

and indicate the reason that the Japanese government sought to strengthen ties with the American government in the late twentieth century: during the height of the trade war between Japan and the United States, measures needed to be taken to improve Western perception of Japan's role in the global economy.

McConnell (2000) explains that the JET program's mission was outlined and presented as a "gift" to Ronald Reagan by the Japanese prime-minister in 1986 (p.1). Not only is the JET Program founded on the conflicting discourses of *nihonjinron* and *kokusaika*; it was created as a means of demonstrating Japan's willingness to immerse itself in the global community.

Relationship to Existing Theory

My thesis investigates the perceptions of ALTs who have worked in junior high schools across Japan. Like Crump (2006), Reeve (1997) provides space for Canadian ALTs to voice their points of view and reflections in stating, "rarely have researchers focused on the voices of assistant English teachers or critically analyzed and duly recognized their contribution" (Reeve, 1997, p.2). The author extends this point by suggesting that

> the voices of Canadian ALTs reveal the kind of problems they are having, what they think their contributions are, what they are actually doing in the classroom, how they are coping with their new environment and how the JET program is working from their perspective. (Reeve, 1997, p.62)

Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs)

According to Crump (2007), the twofold mission of ALTs employed by the JET Program is to assist JTEs with their instruction of English in Japanese classrooms and to

act as cultural ambassadors for their countries, thereby facilitating the gradual process of Japan's internationalization. The majority of ALTs are not trained as teachers. Perhaps this explains why they are not treated with the same authority as their counterparts (JTEs), who are certified to teach. According to Mahoney (2004), while research into the successes and failures of ALTs has been conducted, very few studies have investigated how ALTs perceive their own roles. Further research into their perspectives would provide valuable information for JET policy makers. Despite the wealth of information that is available concerning the perspectives of JTEs, ALTs' perceptions are commonly overlooked. This is odd, considering that team-teaching, as it is outlined by JET, relies upon the employment and acculturation of foreign assistant teachers in order to fulfill its mandates. But why employ untrained ALTs if their lack of training prevents them from providing optimal assistance for JTEs? Brown and Wada (1998) suggest that the few JET participants who majored in TESL or TEFL clearly felt more prepared for the many challenges they subsequently faced as English teachers than those who majored in English literature or linguistics. This indicates that prior training would serve the interests of the stakeholders involved in efforts to internationalize Japan through EIL.

Most of the ALT participants in Burkett's (2005) study felt that "when the Japanese looked at them they were rarely able to see beyond the conception of *gaijin*" (p.148). McConnell (2000), Otani (2004), and Cannon (1999) all suggest that ALTs are bound to experience varying degrees of discrimination over the course of their employment. This is most probably due to the insular nature of Japan and the relatively recent phenomenon of foreign workers in the Japanese educational context. Regarding

their roles as assistants, “ALTs often complain of receiving less feedback from JTEs than they expected and needed.” (Otani, 2004, p.200)

One of the major problems that emerged in Otani’s (2004) study is the lack of key information and communication, particularly from schools and JTEs to ALTs. The main causes of this problem are usually JTEs’ time constraints, language barriers, and JTEs lack of realization about key information for ALTs. Cook (2009) investigates the way teachers’ perceptions of their responsibilities as educators change as a result of a cross-cultural experience. She concludes that travel abroad teaching experiences have the potential to open minds and teaching practices. While ALTs certainly benefit from the teaching experience they acquire in Japan, it follows that JTEs’ interactions with their foreign co-workers would offer similar benefits.

The dual nature of the ALTs job. Several studies relating to ALTs’ roles as teachers suggest that there is a contradiction that lies at the heart of their job description. Tajino and Walker (1998) as well as Sakui (2004) agree that high levels of pressure placed on Japanese students to pass crucial government exams in their junior high years, leave little time for focus on actual communication with ALTs. However, one of the ALT’s primary mandates is to assist Japanese students with their English communication skills. As the average ALT plays almost no part in the instruction of English grammar, they assist primarily in lightening the moods of their students and in promoting their native cultures through their frequent presence in the classroom.

The JET program’s mandate to assist with the internationalization of Japan is actualized by ALTs who function as both assistant language teachers and purveyors of foreign culture. An important question addressed in my study asks which of these

aspects takes precedence according to ALTs. According to JET's official mandate, an ALT is expected to provide:

> assistance with classes taught by Japanese teachers of the (English) language, assistance with the preparation of supplementary teaching materials, assistance with the language training of the Japanese teacher of the (English) language, assistance with the instruction of English language clubs and other extra-curricular activities. They are also supposed to provide language information for teacher's consultants and Japanese teachers of the (English) language. (e.g., word usage pronunciation, etc.), assist with English speech contests and perform other duties as specified by the participant's host institution (JET, 1996).

After reading this description, the role of an ALT seems relatively straightforward. However, "many foreign teachers living and working in Japan point out that their role is not clear to them." (Otani, 2004, p.28) According to Cannon (1999), the majority of ALTS arrive in Japan with relatively low role clarity regarding their positions as ALTs. It is odd that the above passage makes no mention of the ALT's role as a cultural ambassador given that "one of the most significant merits of ALTs is considered to be raising cultural awareness among Japanese students and teachers." (Fujita, 2006, p.42) Canadian JET participants in Reeve's (1997) study identified the cultural dimension of their job as the most important in the context of encouraging not only internationalization but also English-language learning. In this sense, the mandates of internationalizing students and English language instruction are fulfilled.

Otani's (2004) study reveals a gap between the Japanese government policy of internationalization and the reality at the school level. She claims that the lack of a clearly

defined goal has confused ALTs and JTEs alike. Cannon (1999) concludes that "there could be an inherent, lasting ambiguity associated with the ALT job" (p.65). His research demonstrates "a strong trend for decreasing job satisfaction over the course of the yearlong study […] this decline in job satisfaction indicates that there is a probably inherent problem in the ALT position that engenders disenchantment with the job." (p. 68). The literature suggests that the inherent problem discussed by Cannon (1999) may have something to do with the lack of a clearly defined goal for ALTs.

Native Speaker Ideologies

Like Crump's (2007), Fujita's (2006) study explores issues related to native and non-native English speaking teachers in the context of Japanese English education, specifically in public junior high school settings in relatively rural areas of Japan. She, too, discusses the native speaker as an idealized model. In her interviews, Fujita (2006) asks assistant language teachers employed in the JET Program, and students, about their perceptions of the roles of native and non-native teachers in their English classrooms. In a similar vein, McKay (2002) insists that,

> it is of significance to incorporate [a] perspective of English as an international language into English learning and teaching as a second or foreign language in a way that acknowledges more diverse speakers and their specific objectives in using their language. Thus, the conventional divisions of the roles of native and non-native teachers in English classrooms need to be reconsidered with a reflection on the objectives and contexts of using English (p.1).

Otani (2004) ignores native speaker ideology when addressing ALTs' concerns over their use by JTEs as tape recorders. Instead of offering a critical analysis of this phenomenon, she simply repeats that what is required on the part of the JTE is an explanation of the reasons behind implementation of generic teaching practices, (i.e., using the ALT as a tape recorder, as opposed to addressing larger contextual issues raised by the ALTs concerns). Essentially, Otani (2004) classes ALTs and JTEs into two groups: those who complain and blame JTEs for their dissatisfaction and those who are flexible enough to accommodate them. She seems to suggest that flexible ALTs are the ones with prior teaching experience but provides little data to reinforce her claim. Otani (2004) would have benefited from further investigating the perception of her dissatisfied interviewees rather than accepting the native speaker myth, and placing blame. Fujita (2006) claims that "the roles of ALTS and JTEs in Japanese English education need to be reconsidered with a critical view towards the need for English communicative abilities in the [Japanese] society." (p.2). She concludes that native speaker is not an essential label, that there is no satisfactory characterization of the term native speaker and that it is foolish to accept the construct of a native speaker as a model of competence.

Given that the JET program's primary goal is that of internationalization through the promotion of cultural difference, the role of the ALT as assistant language teacher tends to be compromised. The great majority of ALTs are hired because they are native speakers of English. Thus, it is important to analyze the Model of World Englishes (Kachru, 1985) when attempting to understand why JET employs untrained teachers in the first place. Kachru's (1985) well-known model contains three concentric circles which correspond to Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle countries. Japan,

which falls into the third category, in which English is taught as a foreign language, is considered to be norm dependent. Crump (2007) contends that JET participants are hired on the basis of their native speakership as they provide a normative model for Japanese teachers of English. She explains that such hiring practices promote monolithic, postcolonial ideologies of English and do little to increase effective learning in the Japanese classroom (Crump, 2007).

While Crump (2007) focused her research on native speaker ideologies of English in Japan, I will move beyond her area of interest in order to address the more pressing issue as to whether or not JET participants should be considered language teachers in the first place. This is not to say that the JET program should be abolished, but rather that the ALT's mission might be redefined according to the reality of the JET program's agenda and that the acronym ALT might be adapted to better reflect reality of the ALTs working situation. A contradiction that exists at the heart of the ALT's job description will be analyzed in an attempt to shed light on the problems experienced by inner circle English language teachers employed by language programs across East Asia.

Team Teaching in Japan

According to Tajino and Walker (1998), team teaching in English classrooms, being a relatively new experience, had no established methods, nor principles which teachers needed to follow. The definition of team teaching in the Japanese context is claimed to be unique. Tajino and Walker (1998) explain that,

> unlike other contexts, the two teachers in the English language classroom in Japan are not equal in status. One gains certification through examination and is licensed by the local board of education to teach the English language (ie. The

> JTE), whereas the other (ie. ALT) is uncertified, generally with little formal training or teaching experience (p.114).

Mahoney (2004) explains that while potential frustrations at the gaps between what teachers believe they are supposed to be doing and what they find themselves actually doing are difficult enough for those teaching on their own, they can be compounded in team teaching situations since gaps may exist between the two individuals' perceptions of both ideal and actual roles. This is yet another reason why attention to the perceptions of both parties involved is important if improvements to the current model are to be effected. Tajino and Tajino (2000) propose a reconsideration of the notion of team teaching and the nature of the team: they discuss the contribution that point instruction by a native speaking teacher can make to classroom language learning, exploring how two teachers with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds can work together to provide students with more opportunities to improve their communicative competence. They suggest that team-teaching may be most effective when it is 'team learning', in which all participants, teachers and students are encouraged to learn from one another by exchanging ideas or cultural values. Given the many factors which threaten to impede a positive team-teaching experience between both parties involved, it is important to analyze the many dimensions of the relationship between ALTs and their JTE classroom counterparts.

ALT Japanese Language Proficiency

Cannon (1999) claims that language ability is associated with adjustment measures but adds that, oddly enough, "many investigations of sojourner adjustment have tended to

assign only minor importance to language ability" (p.24). Woodman (1998) elaborates upon this argument in stating that,

> one of the most unique aspects of the study-abroad experience is the immersion in the target language community by participants. This immersion both encourages and necessitates the development of communicative skills which are more 'native-like' in order to survive […]" (p.209).

ALTs hired by JET are discouraged from speaking Japanese within the workplace as it is believed to hinder their promotion and propagation of EIL.

JTE and ALT Relations

Most ALTs do not possess a fluent command of the Japanese language and many JTEs are unaccustomed to intercultural encounters such as the ones they experience, often for the first time, with ALTs. Problems may occur as the team-teaching relationship unfolds, over the course of the ALTs placement in the school where the JTE is employed. These problems are compounded by cultural differences, conflicting teaching styles, incongruous philosophies and conflicting personalities. Furthermore, "the origin of a good portion of the friction between many team-teaching partners lies in a confusion or even clashes over which of the two main ALT roles (teaching language and teaching culture) is more important." (Mahoney, 2004, p. 231)

Additionally, according to Kowner (2002), during intercultural encounters Japanese people tend to feel that their social status is violated, to propagate this feeling through their culture and ultimately to dislike and to be apprehensive about such encounters. Similar tensions arise in intercultural encounters across the globe, such as those addressed by Jenkins (2000) in his study of Chinese international teaching

assistants and academic faculty in a university Mathematics department. If ALTs are not offered basic intercultural competence and sensitivity training prior to their placement in Japanese public schools they are likely to encounter roadblocks throughout their JET experience based on their ignorance of Japanese customs (e.g., status hierarchy).

If the success of team teaching depends on cooperation between the teachers, then it is essential that both parties learn to work together as a team-teaching unit (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 1994). Occasional negative experiences between JTEs and ALTs are unavoidable, but authors such as Carless and Walker (2005) are hopeful that

> the negative impacts can be minimized when both collaborators are: well-trained in ELT; more experienced or more capable in collaboration; more culturally or interpersonally sensitive; and more positive towards collaboration. Such team teaching will also have greater impact when team-taught lessons are better integrated with other school, teacher or student priorities, [such as] passing exams (p. 474).

In their study of NETs and LETs in Hong Kong high schools, Carless and Walker (2005) chose to focus their research on good team teaching practices, and to interview NETs viewed by the school community as good collaborators. They claim that more research into positive team teaching practices is necessary if stakeholders hope to improve the effective instruction of English in classrooms across East Asia.

Chapter 2: Purpose and Methodology

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and perspectives of ALTs, employed by the JET program and placed in high schools across Japan, in order to clarify their roles in the Japanese junior high school workplace. The main aim of my thesis is to provide the ALTs I interviewed with a voice through which their perspectives of the JET Program and their own roles in the Japanese workplace might contribute to the current, limited body of research into their perceptions.

In this vein, the main research questions considered for this study included: in what ways does the dual nature of the ALT's job description affect the practice of English instruction in junior high schools across Japan? In addition, the following questions have also been considered as subordinate to the main research questions for the purpose of this study: in what way do ALTs contribute to the learning environment in Japanese classrooms? Are they, in fact, effective as English language teachers? Is the training offered by JET during the pre-departure period sufficient? Do ALTs with prior teaching experience have more positive experiences with JET?

Methodology

Due to the experiential nature of teaching English in East-Asia, I approached the research problem from a qualitative perspective, with interviews as a major focus. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) describe the use of interviews in this context as serving a dual purpose in that they both "may be the dominant strategy for data collection, or they may be employed in conjunction with participant observation, document analysis, or other techniques." Due to the limitations discussed, I used interviews as the main strategy for

data collection in addition to the narrative of my personal experience as well as the incorporation of exerts from studies exploring the themes addressed in my own. While observation of JET participants in their milieu would have provided further depth to this study, I did not use this technique for data collection due to the distance separating me from my research context.

The research proposal was submitted for approval and hearing to the Ethics Committee of the Department of Education at Concordia. After approval was granted, the interviews with the participants took place in the month of August 2011. The analysis of the findings extended from September 2011 to the fall of 2012. This analysis was accomplished using transcripts of the interviews I conducted with five ALTs who agreed to be participants. In order to identify emerging themes I color-coded the transcripts and isolated related quotes that were later used to illustrate my analysis.

My interviews with the five research participants were recorded with a digital audio recorder and transcribed verbatim. While each ALT's experience was unique, common themes were identified within all of the interviews. I will report the results under the following themes using direct quotes in order to convey their unique perceptions. The major themes identified are:

1. <u>ALTs' perceptions of their roles as JET participants</u>
    a) ALT perceptions of the JET program
    b) ALTs perceptions of their roles as cultural ambassadors/promoters of internationalization
    c) ALT perceptions of their roles as assistant English teachers
    d) ALT perceptions of the Japanese English curriculum
2. <u>The Japanese Workplace</u>
    a) Positive experiences

b) Negative experiences

c) ALT/JTE relations

d) ALT/student relations

e) Feedback received

3. Language Issues
   a) JTE English language ability
   b) ALT Japanese language ability
   c) Native speaker ideologies
4. Training Issues
   a) Sense of preparedness/JET training
   b) Professional development on the job

While I had hoped to complete my thesis in a timely manner, in adherence to my initial six-month time frame, I was hired by a non-profit organization to work with at-risk youth in a Northern Cree community. As a result, my intended date of completion was extended in order to accommodate my heavy workload.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with five ALTs who had returned from their assignments in Japan within the past two years, prior to the commencement of my study. The recruitment of more participants who had just returned from their time abroad would have been ideal. However, my network consisted primarily of ALT acquaintances that had commenced their JET contracts in 2007, the same year as I had. Thankfully, one of my interviewees, Ron, had returned to Montreal three days prior to our interview and thus contributed a narrative of a recently completed experience to my research. Except for Melanie, who taught at the high school level, all of my interviewees worked at the junior high school level in Japan prior to the commencement of my study. I decided to include the perspectives and experiences of one high school ALT as I thought that this

participant would offer some insight into the similarities and differences between the jobs of ALTs working at the junior high school level and those working at the high school level.

In one way, my interviewees did not represent normative hiring practices in the JET program in that three out of five of them were qualified teachers prior to the commencement of their contracts with JET. In addition, four of the ALTs I interviewed were born and raised in Quebec, Canada by Canadian francophone families. Thus, they were not native speakers of English, but acquired the language as young students through ESL courses or immersion programs offered by schools in Quebec. On the other hand, these same ALTs I interviewed represented normative hiring practices in that they possessed only basic Japanese language skills when they first arrived in Japan. I focused on ALTs' experiences in junior high schools because I was interested in finding out if my own experiences and perceptions of the Japanese junior high school workplace would be complemented or challenged by comparison.

I conducted interviews with ALTs who either are or who have been residents of the greater Montreal area and I recruited the volunteer participants through word of mouth in my social network. I used a voice recorder to capture the interview details and transcribed them in their entirety shortly thereafter. Two of the interviews were conducted in conference rooms within Concordia's department of Education while three were conducted on the terrace of a café neighboring the university. And although Glesne (2011) asserts that usually "it is important to plan a series of interviews with the same person over time so that rapport can be established and time can be sufficient for learning from respondents" (p.107), I found that my initial hour-and-a-half long interview with

each of the five participating ALTs provided rich enough data that I did not need follow-up interviews. It should also be noted that rapport was established with all of the interviewees prior to my departure with JET; all of the former ALTs I interviewed were acquaintances from my peer network, and thus appeared relaxed and receptive to my questions.

The privacy and confidentiality of the ALT participants was protected through the use of pseudonyms relating to their own names, names of places, institutions and other individuals with whom they worked. Prior to the interviews, I assured my respondents that all personal information would remain confidential. I asked them to complete the consent forms attached in the appendix of my thesis. Participants had the right to withdraw from my study at any point if they did not wish to continue. However, they all agreed to remain involved. I informed all participating ALTs that data collected from interview sessions would be incorporated into my Master's thesis to be presented within Concordia's Educational Studies program. Each participant received the transcription of their interview to make sure that I represented their answers correctly.

Chapter 3: Results

The purpose of my study was to consider the perspectives of ALTs hired by the JET Program and placed in junior high schools across Japan. An exploration of their experiences and perceptions, both positive and negative, will contribute to the limited body of research that seeks to give voice to ALTs, who are key stakeholders in Japan's internationalization efforts. Five ALTs participated in this study: Steve, Edward, Charlenne, Melanie, and Ron. This chapter presents the findings obtained through hour-long interviews with each participant. The aim of this qualitative study was to identify and report the unique perspectives of ALTs who had recently returned to Montreal after their time spent abroad working for JET. The research questions that guided my study were: in what ways does the dual nature of the ALT's job description affect the practice of English instruction in junior high schools across Japan? In what ways do ALTs contribute to the learning environment in Japanese classrooms? Are ALTs equipped with the tools necessary to meet the goals outlined for them by JET? Are they, in fact, effective as English language teachers? Is the training offered by JET during the pre-departure period sufficient? Is the native speaker model perpetuated by JET a necessary component in the recruitment process?

Participants

The participants in my study worked for JET between 2007 and 2011 and were located in rural and semi-rural areas in prefectures across Japan, with the exception of Steve who worked in Hiroshima. Four of the five research participants worked in junior high schools. One of the participants, Melanie, worked at the high school level. Ron worked at both the high school and junior high school levels. With the exception of Ron,

who had returned to Montreal two days prior to our interview, the former ALTs in my study had returned between one and two years prior to the commencement of my research. All of the participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Steve

Steve was an ALT in Hiroshima for two years, between 2008 and 2010. In many ways, he does not represent the average JET participant. He is in his late thirties. When he left for Japan, four years ago, he was already a qualified teacher. Accompanied by his wife, Kana, of Japanese origin, and their two children, he was not just embarking on a fun-filled adventure abroad, like many of his fellow ALTs, but rather seeking to understand the nature of the Japanese educational system while carrying out his responsibilities as a father and husband. Having learned about Japanese educational norms from his wife, he approached his new job with pedagogical reservations. Nonetheless, he went into the experience intent on making a difference in the lives of the people he would meet throughout his time in Japan.

Steve, like most ALTs, worked for his town's board of education. He was assigned to teach at four junior high schools. As a result of his age, the nature of the job, and his status as a married man with children, he described both his personal and professional experiences as challenging. While he refused to label these experiences as positive or negative, he explained that he began questioning many of his personal and professional views as an educator through his job as an ALT. His critical nature lent itself to moments of self-doubt, insecurity, and frustration. It was clear that regardless of his satisfaction as an ALT, the experience affected him profoundly.

Ron

Ron left Montreal for Japan in 2007 and returned home 4 years later. He was placed in Seki City which is located in Gifu Prefecture, an area that borders my own placement in Ishikawa. He described his time there as the continuation of a love affair that began prior to his departure. Ron's situation was unique in that he taught both high school and junior high school over the course of his time with JET. He was transferred to junior high as a result of budget cuts and taught at 4 schools over a four-year period. He was very positive about the JET Program and his role as an ALT, despite some setbacks he encountered throughout his four years abroad. While his time at the high school was generally unfulfilling, he spoke positively about his job at junior high. He considered his primary contribution as an ALT to be the positive and energetic approach he brought to the learning environment and took great pride in the enduring relationships he formed with a number of his JTEs. He plans on returning to Japan indefinitely.

Edward

Edward was placed in Mie Prefecture (Nagano) and worked as an ALT for the Kameyama Board of Education. He spent 3 years with the JET Program (2007-2010). He was untrained as a teacher prior to his departure from Montreal. Although he worked primarily at one junior high school, he spent one day a week working at a local elementary school. He described his overall experience as predominantly positive and explained that his time in Japan was both life changing and eye opening. Edward spoke very positively of the Japanese people and their hospitable nature. He remained in contact with many of the friends he made while he was with JET. He is affiliated with JETAA

(JET Alumni Association) and plans on returning to Japan in the near future.

Sharon

Sharon obtained her teacher's certificate three years before her journey to Japan. She graduated university with a major in French as a Second language and claimed that the instructional techniques she acquired in her university days sufficiently prepared her for her experience as an ALT. She was placed in Kumamoto Prefecture and worked at two junior high schools over a three-year period. She left Montreal in July of 2007 and returned three years later. Her experience as an ALT was positive, for the most part, though she did experience a serious bout with culture shock at the outset of her sojourn. Despite the onset of depression due to feelings of exclusion, Sharon's resilient attitude and determined nature carried her through the rough times and helped her to overcome the obstacles she encountered. She established close relationships with many of her co-workers and remains connected to Japan.

Melanie

I met Melanie at an intensive language course offered to recently recruited ALTs, prior to my own departure from Montreal, in 2007. When she arrived for the interview we spent a few minutes catching up. Melanie is still very involved with the JET Program. She had recently been elected president of JET Alumni Association (JETAA) and still volunteers her time helping to organize pre-departure orientation sessions and carry out tasks necessary to the JET Program's successful operation in Montreal.

For three years, Melanie was a high school ALT in Shizuoka Prefecture. She was placed in an academically well-performing school and allotted a great deal of responsibility in terms of lesson planning and classroom management. She claimed that

her experience as an ALT was very positive and her prior teacher training served her well. She graduated from university with a degree in teaching French as a second language. She also obtained an ESL certificate prior to her departure with JET.

ALTs' Perceptions of Their Roles as JET Participants

ALTs' perceptions of the JET Program. Whatever the sentiments of my interviewees there seemed to be no doubt that their experience with JET impacted them profoundly. All of them described their time in Japan as life changing, in some way. Edward explained, "my experience was absolutely life changing and eye opening […] on many levels". Steve described his experience in a similar fashion by stating that his experience, by and large, could be classified as being challenging to the point of changing his views about many things, both professionally and personally.

Four out of five of my interviewees were very positive about the JET Program and its mandates, while one was critical of its contribution to EIL in Japan. Steve believed that ALTs did not really contribute to the successful instruction of language and foreign culture and claimed that, "I don't think we contribute, I think we participate….which was my conclusion of the JET program. You are a participant but you never contribute to change or improvements."

Additionally, four out of five of the ALTs explained that they left for Japan with an understanding of JET's twofold mission to instruct English and assist with internationalization efforts. However, Ron's understanding of the JET Program's goals was slightly different from the other interviewees in that he understood that

> […] the goal of JET is to get people from foreign countries to go into the lower population areas of Japan so that everyone can have exposure to English. Real

> English. Native English. I thought it was, I thought their goal was for them, those people, to teach English at first, you know I, that's what I thought.

In contrast, Edward emphasized the intercultural elements of JET in stating,

> […] what's important to remember, I think, is that the E in JET stands for exchange and NOT English, as some people might believe. It's uh…Japan EXCHANGE teaching program so in reality it's very difficult to understand how—to realize how much of exchange is really happening, because I realize that sometimes I'm just doing my class normally but the kids are like "Oh my god, he's like this and like that…that's sooo not Japanese. That's so foreign."

Melanie appeared to share this understanding of the program. She discussed the idea of grassroots internationalization as being a very important element of the JET Program, one which is even more important than the mission of English instruction. She demonstrates these views in suggesting that,

> […] it's about not teaching the language only […] but also teaching the culture […] and sharing. Not necessarily just teaching 'here I am, this is Canada, and you should learn form me.' But also sharing experiences and sharing how Canada is like this and Japan is like this […] and how can we come together? So, it goes a lot further than just being there for the year and then coming back and having nothing to do with Japan. I believe […] it affected me in a way that when I came back, when I quit the program and I came back to Canada I still […] want something to do with Japan. And that's part of my mission in a way.

Sharon's goals were largely in line with those of Melanie's, as demonstrated by her own interpretation of the goals. For her, "[...] there are two main goals: the first one is to make students open minded about English and eager to learn and communicate in English, and the second one is grass-roots internationalization."

ALTs perceptions of their dual roles. Three out of five of the ALTs I interviewed indicated that their roles as cultural ambassadors were fulfilled outside of the classroom, in their every day interactions with Japanese people. These same ALTs explained that they did not promote internationalism as much as they had hoped and expressed sentiments of regret at not having done so within the classroom environment. Edward reflects that this lack of promotion of internationalization is "[. . .] something that I think is unfortunate about my experience … that I did not promote internationalism as much as I wanted to." However, he also discussed his experience as a foreigner living in Japan and noted that his status as an outsider actually assisted with the mission of internationalization:

> I think the biggest opportunity for me to become this cultural ambassador was outside of the classroom […] it's just living in Japan but outside of the school: you go to the super market and the lady stops you: "Hey what are you buying, what do you eat? What do foreigners like?" and all those kind of questions that make you realize you have a chance to teach them about your own culture.

On the other hand, Sharon explained that her role as a cultural ambassador was virtually non-existent. She found that, "[she] didn't have to do a lot of international lessons. At the very beginning I did… like when I did my jikoshyoukai stuff […] but that was the only time."

Four of the five of the ALTs I interviewed are French Canadian. English is their second language. Although three of them spoke with noticeable French Canadian accents, it seemed that their jobs in the classroom were facilitated as a result of English being their second language. Melanie explained that her fluency in French actually assisted her mission to promote internationalization. However, she was surprised that teachers expected her to teach English while having little or no conception of her role as a purveyor of internationalism. Steve approached his mission as a cultural ambassador from a critical perspective, and questioned the very concept of internationalization in recalling the nature of his involvement in the classroom

> […] when I needed to be involved, it would be invariably some kind of activity that involved either talking about Canada or Britain, so then I could in some way produce an activity that would be bolted on or incorporated into a lesson that had something to do with the overall lesson and had a cultural or an international kind of vibe to it…but who was I trying to internationalize? That was the thing. And was it needed? [. . .] Well, I probably was there to be internationalized, or Japanized, I should say.

ALT perceptions of their roles as English language teachers. Three out of five of my interviewees claimed that their roles as English language teachers took precedence in the classroom. They indicated that their job focused primarily on relaying English grammar points and assisting Japanese students with their oral communication skills. All of them acknowledged that Japanese students' English language ability was limited by the amount of time allotted to the instruction of English in Japanese high schools. Steve

appeared realistic about the role of English instruction in Japanese classrooms and noted that,

> I'm not kidding myself, you know, English is – the learning of English is – at least, a very, very, very small part of a child's life at school. Actually… it's way down there with everything else. It's like with sweeping the classroom. Actually, sweeping the schools and cleaning the schools is more important than English.

In this vein, Ron viewed himself as a "living tape-recorder" meant to serve as a native speaker model for his students, but he also held that his presence contributed to the students' enjoyment of English lessons

> […] in junior high my role is I'm a live tape recorder. So, I know, that's all you are really… I was the sound of English. Um, so my job? Yeah, to be the voice on the tests, to coach for the speech contest, which I took very seriously and um…to be the tape recorder in the class. And then my fourth role was to play games in the class to make the lessons fun.

Edward perceived his role in the classroom in a similar way, emphasizing the fun factor as a motivational tool in noting that "[…] they expected us or they expected me a lot to…motivate the troops, you know? I'm there to be like 'English is cool,' 'English is not so difficult' and, 'uh…it's fun! So just, forget about everything and go for it.'

Trained as teachers prior to their JET experience, both Steve and Melanie had issues with the method of language instruction employed in Japan. Steve explained that the number of hours that Japanese students were exposed to English language learning,

not even 300 hours on a yearly basis, was not enough for them to grasp or be competent in the subject. Upon reflection, he notes that he

> always questioned whether their [the Japanese] approach was right in terms of the textbooks they produced, the age that it started, the number of hours per week, the kinds of teachers that were teaching, the methodology behind teaching, right all the way through. So for me, it set up situations that were always going to fail.

Sharon perceived Japanese ESL instruction similarly:

> I found that the way the English program is made really doesn't lead the students to speak in English. Like, they know… a word that I barely knew… they know what that means because it's in the book and they have to learn it for their entrance exam but there's no way they're gonna put that in a sentence and yeah, the program is really frustrating, I find.

The Japanese Workplace

Positive experiences. Two out of five of the ALTs in my study reported having predominantly positive experiences in the workplace. Four of them were generally satisfied with their roles as ALTs while one was generally dissatisfied. Steve described mostly negative experiences while working in junior high, but he found comfort and kinship working with special education students:

> So, I'm hard on myself, I'm hard on them, so it makes it sound like a whole hard experience, but now you mention the positives, you know […] there were so many beautiful things. I worked a lot with one group of special ed. students, pretty much every week, and if I didn't go down there, if for whatever reason there was a club

> activity or a conflict of time tables, they would be really upset […] and, you know, these kids loved me going down there […] I have so many fond memories of my time in special education.

Sharon also had fond memories of her time working with special needs students:

> They couldn't really make real sentences but I made them copy sentences and they were all excited and like […] they put it on the walls and they were proud of themselves, so that was really cool. And like, one of the kids […] I taught him for the whole time that I was there, and he actually cried when I left. He was like, "what do you mean you're not coming back?" like, "no today's my last class, I'm going back to Canada" like, "why?" "Because it's my country." "But why?" Like, he totally didn't get it. And he cried because he understood that he wasn't gonna see me again.

In contrast to the mixed experiences of other participants, Ron appeared to express mostly positive experiences and generally seemed to enjoy his time as an ALT. He claims that he "was happy every day there [junior high school], and um, yeah, I had a very good relationship with the teachers. So, I mean, I had the best possible scenario. I really can't imagine anything better."

Three of the ALTs described the ease with which they went about their days at work. Edward discussed how enjoyable his job was due to the minimal amount of responsibility involved, but added that he was often embarrassed by how little responsibility was assigned to him. He notes that his "job was really easy and fun. Uh…no responsibilities whatsoever. Whenever there was a problem somebody was

dispatched to deal with it, and I didn't have to do anything... to the point that it was embarrassing […]."

And while ALTs are supposed to act in the capacity of assistants, three out of the five JET participants I interviewed expressed being most satisfied when functioning as classroom leaders. Edward explained that he felt a sense of accomplishment and professional growth when JTEs began giving him more responsibility. He found that this experience was "absolutely satisfying for me […] to be able to lead the class the way I wanted to and um […] I was free to adapt to each classroom […]." Despite their clearly defined roles as assistants, three out of my five interviewees indicated that they either led lessons or taught by themselves and were proud of these opportunities. Edward reflects on the increased responsibility of his second year as an ALT and notes

> I was still an assistant in some way, but really I was teaching. It was my time and I could decide […] I could make […] I could do whatever I wanted in the classroom. They say, "you have forty-five minutes and the grammar point is this […] you have to teach this. Do whatever you want."

Sharon also led most of her lessons, sometimes teaching without the presence of a JTE. She notes that in "communication I was the main teacher. Like, often, one of the JTEs, he would just leave. Like, he wasn't even in the classroom. They would come once in a while to see if, like, the classroom management was okay."

All of my interviewees linked their sense of satisfaction in the workplace to student improvement. Melanie expressed this satisfaction as, "well, just as a professional, you know I'm a teacher, so to see that I could accomplish something—I could get my students from point A to point B—was very rewarding [. . .]." Edward responded

similarly and mentioned that, "[…]as a teacher, when you see some kids improving, that's like the biggest satisfaction you can get as a teacher—as an educator."

Melanie also chose to mention how important her sense of belonging within the workplace was to her general well being, in saying:

> …it [high school staff room] was a huge place and coming in and going to the tea room and just having someone to talk to was really satisfying in that way, that, you know, I'm not Japanese and they've just welcomed me.

Four of the interviewees (i.e., Melanie, Ron, Sharon and Edward) reported a strong sense of belonging due to their being accepted as part of the local team. Ron felt a strong sense of belonging at his junior high and spoke positively about his time there and mentioned a few key points of satisfaction during his experience as an ALT. Namely, Ron felt satisfied by "getting compliments from teachers, being invited to things, [and] feeling like I mattered." Sharon also experienced high levels of satisfaction as a result of her sense of belonging in her junior high:

> I still didn't have the same status as a Japanese teacher, obviously, but I was part of the team and like, you know, the teachers always switch in April so there are new teachers and I was always invited to all the *enkais* [Japanese work parties] and they would introduce me, like "oh, and do you know Sharon? Sharon is our ALT" and it was…I felt like I was part of the team. So, that was cool.

Negative experiences. All of the interviewees reported varying degrees of job dissatisfaction associated with negative experiences in the workplace. One of the five interviewees, Steve, had a predominantly negative experience as an ALT, and was quite

explicit in his distaste for the Japanese perception of his role in and out of the classroom. He described his job as follows:

> …it kind of ranged from being a cultural monkey or a clown in the classroom and then a tape recorder. I didn't go outside of those— inside the classroom, at least—I didn't go outside of that. It didn't really matter. My ideas were not important to my co-workers and I didn't really voice them to be honest. Only once. And I apologized for it later on. So, it really didn't matter. I didn't see the significance or importance of my role. I was a human being put in a position. And it could have been any human being put in a position to do that job.

Steve explained that the JTEs were generally reticent to him introducing anything foreign or unusual into the classroom dynamic. He also illustrated the discomfort he experienced as a result of his otherness, offering a specific example in school lunch periods.

> [. . .] you can take something like school lunches as an example. So, I went there, I went there with books and magazines. I went there with food to share. You know, I tried to make things happen. But you're not supposed to, okay? You're not. You're supposed to go, eat lunch, and leave. You're not supposed to have fun. You're not supposed to enjoy the experience. So, the more and more I did that, the more I realized that it just wasn't worth my time. And I kind of like eating food in comfort and enjoy it, and being laughed at when you eat food wasn't a pleasant experience.

Similarly, Edward described his experience of trying to introduce a foreign concept into the classroom learning environment, expressing his frustration at the reaction of his JTE:

> Oh, I remember one day I told the kids that in Canada, during summer vacation, we

> don't go to school every day for club activities and sports and everything and never on the weekend, NEVER on the weekend, and the teacher was FURIOUS that I had told that. "(Inhales sharply) What have you done, blah, blah, blah…" So I wasn't there to tell them anything that was BETTER about Canada than Japan. NO WAY. And sometimes I could feel that I was there to say something funny and interesting about Canada but they WOULDN'T let me step in and do […] oh yeah, and maybe Japan is not so perfect…open your eyes, there is something more in the world that you can see

Sharon also recounted a negative experience of having unconsciously challenged the Japanese system. She told the story of how she was assigned to supervise and assist with cleaning the girls' bathroom during the daily time slot allotted to cleaning the school. At first she found the idea of such an assignment to be odd; she didn't consider it to be part of her job description. Nonetheless, she agreed to participate. The group of girls she was assigned to supervise was always excited to spend time with her and saw their cleaning chores as an opportunity to converse and joke with their ALT. Sharon, unaware that this cleaning period was supposed to be carried out in silence, was equally excited to talk with the girls. She viewed it as an opportunity to help the students with their English communication skills and claimed that their English had actually improved over the course of the year.

At the start of the new school term, she was suddenly reassigned to collect the garbage in the teachers' room alongside the seventh grade students. Confused by the sudden shift in responsibility, she asked one of her JTEs why she was being separated

from the group of girls she had developed such a good rapport with. The JTE responded that the girls had graduated to *san nensei* (ninth grade) and that their English would begin to improve. Therefore, her placement with the younger students, who had yet to develop the ability to communicate in English, would be more conducive to a focused and uninterrupted cleaning session. She described her confrontation with the JTE who informed her of her the change, "I was like, 'oh really. Am I supposed to clean in silence?' 'Yes, they're supposed to clean in silence.' Like, you could have just told me that. (Laughs) So yeah, the second year on I did garbage duty." Sharon was not even aware of the fact that cleaning duties were supposed to be carried out in such a fashion. She did not understand why no one had taken the time to inform her. She saw the reassignment as a form of punishment, which was administered as a result of her setting a bad example for the girls.

Both Steve and Ron discussed their dissatisfaction with the JTEs' underuse of ALTs. Ron questioned the impact he had on his students given the limited exposure they had to him and wondered how useful he was to the JTEs and their students:

> Oh…well…I sometimes like, um…my role wasn't important. I was totally expendable. I was…a lot of times. Because obviously I'm rotating, right? I'm going around so…so…like, I would do two weeks: one week and one week. So, the ones where I'm one week, there's three weeks I'm not there. Right? So I'm like, "well, how much can I do?" Like, how useful am I?

Steve attempted to account for why ALTs are underused:

> I just think the ALT is underused, and there are multiple reasons why that is. The main one being because nobody knows how to use them, really. You know, and

> also there's the element of fear and confidence and a lot of other things that go with the reasons we're being underused. The other thing is… why are we underused? And that's because, you know, these teachers invariably are working seventy hour weeks and have pages to turn in textbooks and to accommodate us is just an interference in their busy schedule. That's not saying how I felt all the time with all the teachers, but, you know, it was clear that these teachers were busy and that having us in there for them is like I said an interference and…yeah so I was not very satisfied with that side of things.

Almost all of the interviewees were dissatisfied when they felt excluded by the school staff. Edward summarized this feeling in saying that

> […] if I can put a little disappointing note to that at the same time I always felt like I would never be part of the real team of the teachers of course. I don't think it's because I'm foreign at all. I think it's because they worked 12 hours a day. They go on meetings, you know, they do…they really work hard and everything and then I show up eight to four and then "alright I'm going home" and uh….so it's normal that…my job was not to be…my job was not the same as theirs so it's normal I think that I wasn't treated like a member of the group…of the team. But at the same like "yeah, I'd like to be…" I don't know. I was a little bit disappointed from that.

Melanie echoed Edward's frustrations in noting that, "well, it's just—it's not so much of dissatisfaction but it's frustrations where I… I'm a teacher and I don't feel like sometimes I felt I was not totally part of the team."

Melanie also discussed a negative experience she had working with one of her JTEs and the frustration that ensued as a result.

> but to me that wasn't the problem [lack of student interest]; it was more the relationship I had with that other JTE. And we kind of ended up…I don't know…the year just went by and I was frustrated the whole year and I had a few moments where I kind of exploded in class and the JTE would never do anything.

Ron was frustrated by the lack of tasks available for him to carry out and explained that he "WANTED to do something. I would ask them, 'what can I do?' and they're like, 'oh, just sit down.' You know…just tell me what you want me to do…" More generally, Sharon discussed her difficulties adjusting to her new employment in Japan, explaining that she considered terminating her contract and returning home, although she could not cite a particular event. She expresses that this feeling was "really hard to explain though. It wasn't something – like an event in particular – it was like, around February I just felt like I didn't wanna be there anymore and I felt like I wasn't part of the group." Steve discussed his experience of the pressure to conform to the Japanese way of doing things, which he expressed in an analogy to cross-cultural cuisine,

> in the end, you conform. I think after the first year, my instruction of English changed… "…it's like going into an Indian restaurant in Japan and they don't have pilau rice anymore. They have sticky rice. It's rice, okay, but its sticky rice. So, I'm instructing you, but I'm doing it Japan style now. It's what you want, it's what you're used to, it's what you're comfortable with. You don't have to think, you don't have to produce. You just have to regurgitate, and, I swallowed it.

ALT/JTE relations. Given their roles as assistants, all of the ALTs considered their relationships with JTEs as the most important and significant factor in their every day experiences teaching in Japan. All of the interviewees claimed that their roles as assistants varied depending on the JTE that they were paired with on a given day. Edward explained, "…what's interesting, I think, is that my role as an ALT was completely different according to each teacher I was teaching with." He went on to explain how difficult it was to adapt to the different teaching styles he encountered

> […] at the beginning, I found it was very difficult to have completely different styles of teaching, and sometimes within the same year, like, two second year teachers had the same program – same class, same games, same everything – but the style was completely different. And I had to adjust to this. Of course, I was the assistant, so….so uh…yeah, I found it was very difficult…that my role was completely different depending who I was teaching with.

Steve divided the JTEs he encountered into three camps in an attempt to explain the way that his professional relationships with them differed:

> […] in terms of my relationship with the JTEs I would say that in terms of contribution, there were two teachers that wouldn't even let me contribute. There were those that would let me contribute and then would change, make alterations, which I was always happy with. That's fine. That's cool. And then there were those that would collaborate on an equal kind of basis, equal level, and would be open to my ideas and change.

And although the participants mentioned some positive relationships with JTEs. They also noted that some poor relationships with JTEs prevented them from performing efficiently.

> […] the teacher I liked the LEAST was put in charge of my favorite school which I hated. And she's HORRIBLE at English, like, I mean she uses like, you know, um, *honyaku*…like computer programs…to translate the Japanese into English and it's totally illegible. Like, it's nonsensical, you know? So, I hated having to deal with those kind of things, you know. Because the teacher before, at that school, was my favorite teacher.

Edward recounted his negative experience with a JTE who refused to work with him in a constructive manner. Having prepared lesson plans as instructed by most of his JTEs, Edward would arrive in one particular class to be greeted by an older JTE who would instruct him to sit silently in the far corner of the classroom while he told the students to copy and read throughout the entirety of class. The JTE would write the lesson points on the blackboard in English and then write the translation in Japanese beneath the English sentences. The students would be instructed to copy and memorize what was on the board without attempting to communicate in English.

Edward was frustrated by this reoccurring experience and eventually approached the JTE, asking him if he could stay in the teachers' room instead of sitting in the classroom without participating in the lessons. He explained that he felt his presence in the classroom was unfair to the students given that he was not contributing. These students would often approach him and ask why the other kids got to have fun and play games with him. They wondered why it was so different in their case. The JTE responded

to him negatively, brushing him off and refusing to honor his request or take his feedback into consideration. Edward was very upset by the experience and felt that the JTE would rather not deal with him at all.

Melanie also described a negative experience she had working with one of her JTEs,

> …he wouldn't do any discipline whatsoever. But the group was much larger – we had about forty something students as opposed to twenty students. And it was really getting to me because I had no control over the students. The students wouldn't listen, they wouldn't do anything in class, they would laugh at me and laugh…like I could understand that. It's not because I don't speak Japanese perfectly that I can read that. And he wouldn't do a thing.

Four out of five of my interviewees recounted positive relationships with JTEs as catalysts to successful lessons. Ron spoke passionately of his relationship with one particular JTE

> …it was just FLUID, it was so fluid and I love…I…I…I… we were a TEAM, you know? And then she would say "okay" like I would be in the back helping someone, but then she would say "and Ron's gonna read this part" and it was like "oh", and it was my cue, and I would know and it was NATURAL.

Edward recalled a similar experience he had with one of his JTEs:

> […] we built amazing classes, like, lesson plans like this. And in the class we were just (snaps fingers) always looking- out of the corner of our eyes – looking at each other. And we had the greatest – the best – chemistry I've ever had with anybody.

Two of the ALTs I interviewed had relationships with JTEs that extended beyond the workplace. Edward described a secretive relationship he developed with one of his coworkers, explaining that their connection outside of the classroom strengthened their relationship within:

> […] she would come to me because she knew I would keep my mouth shut – I wouldn't tell anybody. And I would not judge her. I mean, I'm not the…"oh, you cannot do your job", no, no, no. I would just listen to her and try to….so it's sad…because we built this relationship on the fact that she was quite depressed about the job. But at the same time, we really built something. That was a real relationship – a real collaboration in the classroom. When I was teaching with her it was WONDERFUL because I knew what she was thinking and I knew she was having a hard time so I was backing her up and being the assistant.

Ron claimed that his efforts to strengthen relationships with JTEs outside of the workplace had a positive effect on their in-school dynamic. He even invited a group of JTEs to his house for an after-work party. He said that they were surprised because past ALTs had never extended such an invitation. His JTEs had a very positive image of him. As a result he was often invited to staff drinking parties, as well as a few smaller, special parties reserved for certain members of the teaching staff. He was even invited to the head English teacher's home for *Obon* (a Japanese festival that honors the spirits of ancestors). He got to meet her family and have dinner with them. He was very touched by this gesture and viewed his positive relationships with JTEs as a point of pride.

ALT/student relations. Three out of five of the ALTs I interviewed emphasized

that their presence in the classroom increased student motivation and student enjoyment of English classes. Sharon described the disappointment her students experienced when she was not scheduled to assist in their classes on a given day, "[…] many of the groups were complaining when they had English classes and I wasn't there. They didn't like it. They were like 'Sharon Sensei, when is she coming, when is she coming?'" Melanie described her mere presence in the classroom as a motivational factor in her students' learning

> …it was always something new for them—something different than just "let's study textbook, page something…" But I think, overall, just me being there was a big factor, too. It wasn't like just someone…some other Japanese teacher coming in to tell them about something, you know? It was like the real person: the real native kind of thing.

Edward also believed that his role in the classroom increased student enjoyment of English language learning. He explained that he noticed improvements in the students' English language skills over the course of his time with them

> …in the three years I saw a few kids that really…really changed their attitude in the English classroom and… of course I don't have one specific example, but I remember that class. That…really, I could see the change…the improvement…they were paying attention in the classroom more and more…

Both Steve and Edward discussed their efforts to connect with Japanese students on a deeper level. Steve recounted an exchange with a group of kids in the hallway of the junior high where he was working:

> I know that students were always interested. I always had a book in my hand. They were always asking me, "what are you reading?" And then I would show them: it would be a picture of a brain. "Why are you reading the brain?" "Because it's a picture of you. I'm reading about you. I'm reading about your development." "Okay, Sensei, you care about us, okay."

Edward explained

> I tried to make it as human as possible. Not just be like every other teacher or yeah…sometimes you arrive…just walking around them or just saying hi, how are you, and then saying the name of the person and then like "what did you do this weekend?" to a kid, and then like "Did you go somewhere?" […] it changes the whole perspective of the student…and how they see your class.

Like Edward, Ron attributed his ability to connect with students to his down-to-earth approach to teaching

> You know, like, I showed them my life outside of school, and they saw me as a person. And I was fun. So, that energy kept over and my way to motivate students was to show them that I'm not just a robot teacher—I'm not just cold – you know? I have interests, and I do stuff and I've been places and things like that…after a while they were always happy to see me […]

Many of my interviewees reported the behavior of Japanese students being one of the major cultural differences that required negotiation and adaptation on their parts. Edward explained:

> I expected them to ask questions when they didn't understand. And to participate. To be involved in the classroom atmosphere and to be alive and stuff like that. And then I quickly realized…and the teacher was kind of looking at me like "what do you expect?" kind of thing. That this is how it is. But they don't – that's the thing – they don't know that you expect something different or they don't know that it's not like that in your culture. So how can they understand and explain to you. For them this is normal, you know?

He added:

> […] if I was doing something wrong they would NEVER tell me, you know, you NEVER tell the teacher that he is wrong. My God. But I was like "no, if I make a mistake on the board, I'm human. You should tell me!" No way, forget it.

Only Steve indicated that his presence in the classroom did not necessarily increase student enjoyment:

> very few of the students I encountered over two years, that's four schools, seventh grade, eight grade, ninth grade, very few of those students were coming out from their lessons having a positive experience […] the enjoyment that these students were experiencing was very low. When I was in the classroom they were low. (Laughs).

Feedback received. Two of the ALTs I interviewed said that the JTEs they were paired with were not clear about what they expected from their ALTs. In one instance, Steve explained that JTEs' expectations were often implied, as opposed to explicitly

stated:

> You know, the Japanese are not so comfortable with being direct. And so it's implied, and often it was implied with my…like for example, when I'd produce something on the present perfect, it was implied that the subjects I was using wouldn't mean much to the students. So, in other words, "please don't do that, please do this."

On the other hand, three of my participants reported receiving clear feedback from their JTEs regarding their expectations of ALTs. Melanie highlighted professionalism as one of the ALT characteristics desired by JTEs:

> […] being professional in what you do is something that I was told a lot… regarding like other ALTs they had worked with in their careers where professionalism is something that they really, really wanted ALTs to have and it's not happening all the time.

However, she added that the feedback was only offered at the end of her contract, explaining that it would be far more useful information for ALTs if put forth early on in their contracts

> I guess I had it [professionalism], so it wasn't a problem. But it's…when we started discussing about it towards the end of my stay that I realized it was really important for them and had I not had that aspect about me…maybe I would not have been accepted…as much.

Ron explained that feedback he received from his high school JTEs revealed that they didn't expect much of him at all:

> […] as soon as I came they were all apprehensive. They were feeling me out, you know. – slowly – so what they wanted me to do is just show up in the classroom, you know, say hi to the students more than the guy before me and just read what I had to read. That's all that they wanted me to do.

Discussing the Japanese hesitancy to reveal their true feelings, Steve explained his uncertainty regarding JTEs' perception of his role in the workplace:

> But then, you know, as somebody once said to me: you can spend a year in the company of a Japanese person and you don't know whether they love you, and you don't know whether they hate you. You never know that, really.

Some of my interviewees recounted discussions they had with their JTEs regarding mutual expectations. Steve described a discussion he had with one of his JTEs:

> It was said, well, one or two said their expectations were that we would follow their lead. It's very clear. Others weren't so direct. There was one newly qualified teacher who was actually trying to qualify for his prefectural permit to teach, and this question came up, and he asked me to answer this question and I asked him to answer the question. We discussed what our relationship was and roles and expectations, and it was, you know he was very clear that JTEs saw ALTs as supports and nothing more than that.

While Edward reported predominantly positive experiences, he was frustrated by the lack of feedback and communication between himself and some of his co-workers:

> It was difficult for me to understand what was expected and at the same time the impact they wanted me to have. There was definitely a lack of communication for

> many reasons – lack of time, teachers were busy – and… sometimes I felt like I was just put there in the corner.

Language Issues

JTEs' English language ability. Despite the JET Program's emphasis on Japanese language skills being unnecessary to ALTs working as support staff for their Japanese counterparts, all of the interviewees highlighted poor English language skills on the part of JTEs as an impediment to smooth work relations and effective communication in the workplace. Steve attributed his JTEs' poor English to a general disinterest in the language and culture,

> […] a JTE doesn't need to speak English…funny enough. They are Japanese teachers of English, but they don't necessarily have to speak it. And what was the thing that got me a lot about them is that a lot of them weren't even interested in English.

Edward recounted his memory of an older JTE who refused to speak English, despite his role as a lead English teacher:

> […] there was an older JTE, a man, in his late fifties almost retiring and that man never spoke a word of English to me. He spoke only Japanese to everybody. I never heard him speak English, like you know, typical old, grumpy man.

Ron was dissatisfied by the English language ability of some of the JTEs he worked with:

> I was dissatisfied with the caliber of English that some of the teachers had. I think there's a minimum you need to have to be a teacher and she didn't meet that minimum.

Steve was puzzled by this phenomenon:

> […] many teachers that teach English don't really like the language. They just happen to be okay at it. And so teach it. I always found it kind of weird that a JTE was teaching English but had never been out of the country. I found that really strange, you know? It's like being into French food and never eating it. I mean, where does that come from?

ALTs' Japanese language ability. While JTE's English language ability was a factor in the everyday work lives of ALTs, their own Japanese language skills were highlighted as an important factor in their relationships with students and local staff. Steve admitted that his inability to speak Japanese had a negative effect on his JET experience:

> They were having to work double duty because of my lack of language, I was a humble person. I was a polite person. I was a punctual person. I was a reliable person. I was all these beautiful things, but I was useless at speaking their language.

Ron explained that his knowledge of Japanese was essential to his relationship with Japanese students:

> […] being an effective teacher is connecting with the students. And if you don't speak their language it's hard sometimes. Because English is not enough. Like, they're, you know, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen years old. They're not fluent in English. So, if you have Japanese and you can speak, like it always helps. Like, I would mix English and Japanese but if I just used English they would be more distant. So, I think in the classroom, you don't need it. But for me…my job was not

just in the classroom.

Two of the ALTs I interviewed admitted to using Japanese within the classroom as a method of relaying English grammar points. Edward recounted the difficulty he faced trying to teach without the use of Japanese:

> I started explaining in English and of course the kids would just look at the JTE like "please translate. We don't understand." But then I was speaking English and saying a few key words in Japanese. Or, pausing and being like, "Do you understand that?" or "What's that word?"… so making sure the kids follow or giving them hints, because they cannot understand everything. And then the kids started, I guess trusting me, or relying more on me. Like, "Okay we don't need the Japanese teacher anymore because if we have a question he can help us". So, just to know…just to let them know that you understand Japanese for them… was such a big relief. Even for other teachers. Teachers were scared to death to talk to me and then I'd say, "Oh, I speak Japanese, don't worry" and then "oh, oh, oh, okay, okay!" and then we would speak English the whole time, but they were not so nervous because they knew that if something happened then we could switch to Japanese.

When asked if her knowledge of Japanese made her job as an ALT easier, Melanie responded:

> Yes. Well, I guess my role as an English teacher, maybe more or less, because I was asked not to speak Japanese in the classes. But outside of that role in the

> classroom… just walking in the hallways or speaking…just chatting with other teachers and students…outside of the classroom…probably yes. A lot.

She also related language issues to her sense of belonging, and noted that, "I always had to run around and ask what was going on because I couldn't understand. I think the language barrier was a big thing."

Sharon explained how difficult it was when she first arrived in Japan, without knowledge of the Japanese language, and explained that "at the beginning I didn't speak Japanese so it was really hard to make contact…and because they didn't speak English, obviously." She viewed ALTs' efforts to learn the Japanese language as a matter of respect towards citizens of her host nation

> I wouldn't say that it's necessary to speak Japanese before going. Like, doing your effort. I'm good with languages though, so I learned it pretty fast. But, I didn't have a choice! (laughs). But, I feel like it's really important, and also I feel like it's a question of respect. I mean, "I'm there to teach you English and I don't want to learn Japanese". That doesn't make any sense to me. Like, there was a girl – she was there for three years and she didn't speak Japanese and I thought that was awful and very disrespectful and I didn't… first I didn't understand how she could get around and second yeah…I mean… you're there to teach your culture but you're also there to…you know it's an exchange! So, I felt she was not being respectful of the community.

She also correlated her Japanese language proficiency with her ability to overcome the culture shock she experienced:

> …I would cry. Every night, I was like, I think I'm having culture shock. That's what's going on. It's gonna go away. Just keep on learning Japanese… and that really kicked my butt: to learn more Japanese to fit in, my first year.

Regarding her belief that knowledge of Japanese is essential to the ALTs successful integration in the workplace, Sharon stated, "I don't feel like it is possible for you to have your place, like to feel like you belong in the school…because you cannot communicate with anyone else. So, it's a big problem."

Native speakership. In response to my question regarding her understanding of the JET Program's mission statement, Melanie replied, "I should be able to understand them. Of course it's an exchange program where they send teachers to teach – like native speakers of English – to teach English."

Four out of five of my research participants repeatedly used the term native speaker when referring to themselves and other JET participants. Ron often used the term in reference to himself despite the fact that English was not his first language:

> So they would use me for the tests, like, when they made recordings, I would say the questions or I was the native speaker. Like, I was the male foreigner and the teacher the female Japanese person and we would have those kinds of conversations.

Discussing her own insecurities about teaching a language that is not her mother tongue, Melanie explained, "when I first arrived I was a bit wary of English not being my first language." However, she emphasized that with time she embraced the reality of her situation and used it as a tool to promote internationalism and inter-culturalism within her classes. She explained

> …the second year I was more comfortable with it [English], and I kind of went along with, you know, "English is not my first language. French is." And so…the first self-introduction, at the beginning of the school year, I did it all in French. There was no English involved. Even though I was supposed to teach English. But it was really cool and to have the students and my colleagues go like "Wow, you speak French! How is that possible?" Speaking two languages in the same city – in the same environment. So, in that way it was really cool – where it was like embracing different cultures.

Sharon, who had a predominantly positive experience with JET, also explained how her French mother tongue was useful in assisting with the process of internationalization

> I taught them French a little bit because French is my first language so I gave them French lessons around Saint-Jean- Baptiste day. Like, "okay, today it's my national holiday, so we're gonna learn French today." Which was really cool.

Training Issues

ALTs' sense of preparedness/JET training. Three out of five of my interviewees reported being completely unprepared for their experience in the Japanese classroom. Despite his former teaching experience and certification, Steve believed that he was not adequately trained for the very different teaching context he had entered through JET and remarked that, "all my training for the past four years and all my experience, it didn't serve any…any use to me."

In this vein, Ron, who was untrained as a teacher, felt completely lost and said, "you gotta plan everything and you know I wasn't really a teacher so that was really hard,

you know, like thrown into it: just teach English. Where do I start, you know?" He was frustrated by the lack of training provided by JET prior to his departure and expressed a wish for more thorough preparation. He was surprised that his own understanding of his role as an ALT ended up being very different from the perception of his role by JTEs and Japanese students, especially at the high school level

> They're just like, you know, they're expecting a clown or something. You know, some kind of entertainment. And I'm like…I didn't…I was totally unprepared for that so that's where some kind of training would have been useful, either from JET, or just if I had known what I was getting into I would have like to have had, uh, some kind of a course to prepare me.

Ron believed that regardless of North American teacher certification ALTs may acquire prior to their JET experience, they are not capable of acting as lead teachers in the classroom

> We (ALTs) are not qualified. To TEACH a Japanese person you have to speak Japanese. It's not possible. I mean, you can do gestures and everything but they'll never understand. You have to explain in Japanese WHY it's like that. Because it's such an alien…they're TOTALLY separate languages.

Ron also called into question how useful the training sessions offered by JET on an annual basis actually were and claimed that he felt that, "when you go to the yearly orientations you don't get much from them. After a second year, you gain nothing I find."

The three ALTs trained as teachers prior to their JET experience admitted that their training affected their approach to teaching English in Japan. Melanie explained that her JTEs reacted more positively to her as a result of her training

> I have a background in teaching….. I got a teacher's degree teaching French as a second language and I also did a certificate in English – ESL. So, when I first got there….it was very nice…it was very open because the teachers already knew I had teaching experience and I was…I don't know how to explain…but I guess it was a very, very positive experience overall…

Sharon also believed that her prior teaching experience prepared her for her job as an ALT

> I was already a teacher for three years before I went to Japan: French as a second language major. But the techniques are exactly the same to teach whatever language you have to teach so I already had experience… so at the beginning they didn't give me a lot of work but they soon realized that I was able to do the job, so I ended up doing as much as they would do, like in planning…and I did all the correcting for the JTEs.

However, she also admitted to preferring independent instruction as opposed to a team-based approach and remarked that she "liked doing my own stuff – probably because I'm already a teacher so I liked doing…like, you know, I can do it…so…leave me alone….kinda (laughs) kind of thing."

Professional development. Both of the untrained ALTs I interviewed claimed that their experience as ALTs significantly contributed to their professional development. Edward explained

> As I said, at the beginning, I wasn't a real teacher. And then to be paired up with many different real teachers it was a great chance for me to, first of all, learn different styles and see how they were different approaches. Some worked very fine - some didn't work at all and you always seem like "wow, how come this teacher teaches like that, you know the other one is completely… you know. You get to learn that.

Edward's overwhelmingly positive experiences actually resulted in his decision to embark upon a new career path

> When I arrived there, I didn't really have any real teaching experience. It was a really big shock. But then I loved it and I really worked hard to make it happen. And now I want to become that kind of teacher, for my career, so, it really brought a lot to me. That's for sure.

Ron also discussed his professional development focusing on the increase in responsibility assigned to him by JTEs as a result thereof

> So, my role grew over time. It really, really grew. Like…like… so the first year I was a judge, 'cause I had judged before, as a regular judge…my second year I was the main judge for Mino. It was my second year there and they said, "okay, we're gonna let you be the main judge."

Ron also explained that he learned a lot over his first year on the job:

> My first year was the hardest because…it was a school of hard knocks there. I learned a lot. It was very hard. But then I acquired some skills… and I said, I'll reset, and I'll try a new approach and all that, so I got much better the second year and I became a good ALT.

Two of my research participants reported improvements on the parts of their JTEs. They experienced satisfaction as a result of their contribution to this change in their co-workers' approach to teaching. Steve explained that, "what was fulfilling was being able to maybe sometimes share ideas with JTEs and you know maybe drop a penny in there, drop a seed, and they might take these things on board." Edward also stated that he witnessed professional growth on the part of some JTEs

> I was SO pleased to learn that some JTEs have changed, a little bit, their way of teaching or their lesson plans. Not because of me but because of having an ALT…and they kind of learned a little bit more about that….team teaching maybe and stuff… and then they incorporated more of that in their classroom…in their own lessons and then, oh my god, I felt like my job was done there.

He also described his own growth

> I don't know, you know so…as I said I started the job with no knowledge – I didn't know what I was doing…when you think back, "oh my god what did I do the first week of class it was just like…hell." And then…I grew into the role of a teacher.

After presenting the context for the research project in Chapter One, including the

rationale, the research questions and the relevant literature review, Chapter Two described the methodology used to collect the participant narratives. Chapter Three presented the results of the transcripts along themes culled from the different narratives based on the interviews with the participants. In the next chapter, I will present the discussion of the findings of this research project.

Chapter Four: Discussion

In this chapter I will discuss the research findings as they relate to my literature review. The purpose of this study was to provide JET Program ALTs with a voice through which their perspectives on their roles in Japanese junior high schools could be revealed. Five former ALTs from Montreal, recently returned to Canada from their employment in Japan, shared their insights into the practical aspects of the JET Program and their own roles as assistant teachers in Japanese junior high schools and high schools. Common themes were identified within the narratives yielded by hour-and-a-half long interviews with each of the research participants.

Research questions which guided my study included: In what ways does the dual nature of the ALT's job description affect the practice of English instruction in junior high-schools across Japan? Which aspect of the ALTs job takes precedence; their role as an assistant English teacher or their role as a cultural ambassador? In what ways do ALTs contribute to the learning environment in Japanese classrooms? Are ALTs effective as English language teachers? Is the training offered by JET during the pre-departure period sufficient? Do ALTs with prior teacher training have more positive experiences with the JET Program?

Emergent Themes

My research has revealed new perspectives on the JET Program and on team teaching in the context of Japanese education at the junior high level. The main theme identified through the analysis of data was the transformative impact that the JET experience had on both the personal and professional lives of the ALTs as well as the importance of positive relationships between ALTs and their Japanese co-workers. Other

themes that surfaced included ALT perspectives on their jobs as JET participants, their positive and negative experiences within the Japanese workplace, language barriers they faced in their every day lives, and training issues at play in the team teaching context.

ALTs Perceptions of Their Roles as JET Participants

Four out of five of my research participants had predominantly positive experiences living and working in Japan through JET. These same ALTs held the program in high regard and considered that their mission as ALTs had been successful, for the most part. Steve, on the other hand, was frustrated by what he considered the ALT's inability to contribute to positive change within the Japanese educational system and felt bound to the role of participant. Given his extensive background in education, it follows that he would feel frustrated and discouraged by what he perceived as flaws within the Japanese curriculum and within the teaching approaches of his co-workers.

Based on my research, Cannon's (1999) claim that the majority of ALTs arrive in Japan with relatively low role clarity regarding their positions can be called into question; save for Ron, all of my research participants held that they arrived in Japan with a clear understanding of their mission as JET participants and their roles as ALTs. Four of the ALTs I interviewed communicated their desire to take on more responsibility in the classroom and to assume the role of primary teacher. Only Ron seemed truly content and confident functioning in the capacity of assistant. Both Edward and Sharon were satisfied by the fact that they were permitted to lead classes and saw this increase in responsibility as a point of pride and a tribute to their teaching skills. While Edward, Steve and Sharon claimed to possess a clear understanding of the JET Program's mandates, all of them called into question how much they actually contributed to internationalization efforts

within their schools. This contradiction between the JET Program's mission and the actual roles of ALTs should be noted.

As discussed in my literature review, Sakui (2004) claims that the average ALT plays almost no part in the instruction of English grammar but that they assist primarily in lightening the moods of their students and in promoting their native cultures through their presence in the classroom. Despite this claim, three out of five of the former ALTs I interviewed indicated that their primary role in the Japanese classroom involved the instruction of English with an emphasis on relaying grammar points.

I shared a similar experience while I was working in Japan. Some of the JTEs I assisted expected me to focus on English grammar instruction as opposed to developing students' oral communication skills. This proved to be very difficult given my lack of training and the language barrier that came into play when I tried to meet their needs. Unsuccessful lessons tended to result in what I interpreted as awkwardness between the JTEs and myself. This often led to poorly executed lessons and feelings of self-doubt and uncertainty on my part and, as far as I could tell, on the parts of the JTEs I was paired with.

While Otani (2004) points out that many foreign teachers living and working in Japan are unclear about their roles, four out of five of my interviewees claimed that they were clear regarding their roles in the classroom. They also claimed to understand the expectations of the JTEs they were paired with. However, Edward, Sharon and Melanie indicated that they regularly assumed the roles of lead teachers, despite the JET Program's description of the ALT's role as a support resource for local JTEs. This could be a result of the reality they faced in the Japanese workplace; a reality that seems to

conflict with JET Program mandates. Upon my arrival in Japan, I was clear on my role and mission as an assistant language teacher but this clarity was quickly blurred by the expectations of co-workers who seemed to have a different understanding of my job description. By the end of my contract, I had become very clear on what was expected of me by my co-workers, but unclear as to the actual mandates of my job and weather or not the contradiction I perceived need be addressed.

The data yielded by my research calls into question whether or not JET participants should be considered language teachers in the first place. If JET's primary *raison d'être* is to facilitate Japan's internationalization process, it would seem that the reality of many ALTs' working experience conflicts with the JET mission statement. Perhaps the ALT's mission should be redefined according to the reality of the JET Program's agenda. If the acronym ALT could be adapted to better accommodate the JET Program's primary mission of assisting with Japan's internationalization, less confusion might abound on the parts of JTEs and their foreign assistant language teachers. An emphasis on the JET participant's role as a cultural ambassador and purveyor of internationalism would be helpful when reconsidering the current title of the JET participant assigned to assist local teachers in junior high classrooms throughout Japan.

The Japanese Workplace

It is interesting to note that despite the many obstacles they faced throughout their Japan experience, all of my interviewees, even those critical of the Japanese education system, managed to identify positive elements within their work lives. Both Steve and Sharon highlighted their time spent with special needs students as one of their most positive and fulfilling experiences as ALTs. Perhaps the otherness

experienced by both parties, combined with relatively undeveloped language communication skills, may have strengthened the bond that formed between these young students and their ALTs.

Edward's recollection of having little to no responsibility in the workplace is similar to my own. Many of the ALTs who were a part of my social circle in Japan frequently voiced similar complaints. There was a general perception on the part of most of the people I encountered, both Japanese and non-Japanese, that the ALT job is a "free ride" of sorts. This bothered me because I wanted to contribute to the education of my students and assist other staff members in the accomplishment of work-related tasks. I was frustrated by the fact that no matter how much I informed them of my willingness to perform work related tasks, I was often told that there was nothing for me to do. There were days I would sit at my desk, feeling useless and unneeded.

Steve and Edward's negative experiences trying to introduce foreign elements into the Japanese classroom deserve attention. As mentioned in my literature review Crump (2006) contends that the JET Program was built on the conflicting discourses of *kokusaika* and *nihonjinron*. In the instances described by Steve and Edward, their attempts to propagate *kokusaika* were met with resistance as a result of what seems to be a degree of close-mindedness on the part of their co-workers and students. These are perfect examples of the way that many Japanese hope to internationalize their country while being extremely reticent to the imposition of actual changes to their current system.

As mentioned in my literature review, Cannon (1999) contends that there can be a great degree of ambiguity associated with the ALT job; he concludes that there is probably an inherent problem in the ALT position that engenders disenchantment over

the course of the ALT's JET experience in the Japanese workplace. Contrarily, my research indicates that ALTs capable of successful working relationships with their Japanese co-workers are more likely to experience increasingly high levels of enjoyment over the course of their time with JET. It should be noted that my own experience is more in line with Cannon's (1999) claim, but that this may be a result of my failure to establish positive relationships with many of my co-workers.

Save for Steve, all of my interviewees reported having high levels of job satisfaction as a result of the positive relationships they fostered with JTEs. Sharon, Ron and Edward wanted to be part of the team and their enjoyment of the ALT job seemed to be directly related to their sense of belonging within the group dynamic. Melanie felt welcomed and reassured by the friendly and inviting atmosphere she entered on a daily basis, at her high school.

Mahoney (2004), as previously stated, claims that frustrations on the part of both JTEs and ALTs can be compounded since gaps exist between their perceptions of ideal and actual roles. My study may help to partially fill this gap by offering ALT perspectives on their roles and relationships with JTEs. Mahoney (2004) holds that the origin of a good portion of the friction between many team-teaching partners lies in a confusion or even in clashes over which of the two main ALT roles (i.e., teaching language and teaching culture) is more important.

Kowner's (2002) claim that during intercultural encounters, Japanese people tend to feel that their social status is violated and to be apprehensive about such encounters may help to explain the behavior of some of the JTEs described by my interviewees. Perhaps this sense of status violation accounts for the shyness and reticence exhibited by

the JTEs that Edward and Sharon viewed as unfriendly and uninterested in connecting with them on a personal level. Older members of the Japanese teaching staff tend to be more traditional, upholding social customs and conventions that are less prevalent with the younger generations. As ALTs are not always familiar with Japanese custom it is possible that they unconsciously commit social blunders which result in social tension. All of my interviewees were outgoing and confident people. In the Japanese context, such confidence can be interpreted as an overstepping of social boundaries. As Carless and Walker (2005) suggest, perhaps more training in the field of intercultural sensitivity would assist ALTs in fostering positive relationships with their Japanese co-workers.

My own experience trying to relate to my co-workers might be useful in the analysis of intercultural encounters between ALTs and JTEs. On many occasions I would share personal details about my life. For example I would tell my colleague, a young Japanese man recently graduated from university, about my relationship with my Japanese girlfriend, seeking insight into the mind and behavior of Japanese women. I would openly discuss my political beliefs and inquire about those of my fellow teachers. If I was dealing with culture shock and feeling isolated in my small town, I would share it with the people around me when they asked how I was doing. It was only after my second year in Japan that I began to understand my error; as far as most Japanese people are concerned this type of personal information should never be shared with one's coworkers, especially in the workplace. I had committed repeated social errors without even realizing it. It is very probable that my research participants may have committed similar errors throughout their acculturation to the Japanese workplace. Perhaps differences in what was considered socially acceptable between Japanese society and

their own played a part in the development of some of the less positive working relationships they had with certain JTEs.

All of my interviewees accounted for successful team-taught lessons between themselves and their JTEs by describing a kind of chemistry that resulted from these particular pairings. They spoke of such team teaching relationships with enthusiasm and recollected them fondly. It should be noted that many of these positive collaborations were often with younger members of the Japanese teaching staff. Contrarily, many of the negative experiences described were with older staff members who simply didn't have the time or patience to work with their ALTs in a productive manner. Perhaps generations who have been privy to Japan's gradual internationalization are and will be more receptive to the young ALTs entering their classrooms.

Four out of five of the research participants described their presence in the classroom as a motivational factor that contributed to students' increased enjoyment of their lessons. Only Steve suggested that their enjoyment levels were low regardless of whether or not he was present. Given my own experience, I have no doubt that my presence encouraged Japanese students to practice their English while heightening their motivation. Regardless of my relationship with the JTEs at my junior high school, I always found comfort in the warm and eager smiles of the youth who greeted me with such enthusiasm on a daily basis.

Unlike my own experience, most of the ALTs I interviewed reported having received significant feedback from their JTEs. Steve explained that the feedback he received was predominantly non-verbal in nature but that he was very clear on what his JETs expected of him despite the indirect way that these expectations were implied. As a

result of Steve's longstanding relationship with a Japanese woman, it is possible that he was more skilled at interpreting this behavior. However, most ALTs do not have this type of insight at the outset of their JET experience. I, for example, am certain that I misinterpreted the reactions of my JTEs on multiple occasions.

Although it took my research participants a while to find their niche in the workplace, they claim that they were all clear on what was expected of them by their Japanese co-workers. However, as previously noted, these expectations often deviated from those outlined by JET. Despite the relative clarity on the parts of my research participants, there is no formal feedback offered to JET participants. Perhaps a yearly report anonymously filled out by JTEs and submitted to ALTs indicating areas in which they might improve would be beneficial to all parties involved.

Language Issues

All four of the ALTs I interviewed who worked at the junior high school level indicated that they had encounters with JTEs who had difficulty communicating in English, either because of their JTEs' fear of making mistakes or because of their poor English language skills. I often encountered JTEs who were not fluent in their language of instruction. This was very surprising to me. While they were capable of relaying basic grammar by speaking to the students in Japanese, I often had difficulty understanding their guidance and their cues, both in and outside of the classroom. If JTEs operate as leaders within the team teaching composite, it is paramount that their English communication skills meet a standard of fluency. Edward, Steve and Ron indicated that many of the JTEs they encountered had poor English language skills and were often shy or insecure about interacting with their foreign co-workers. It follows that they might

have been reluctant to instruct grammar points in front of ALTs, preferring to take a back seat while these points were relayed by the more fluent, native speaker. I remember being amazed at how few of my JTEs were capable of freely conversing in English. I figured that given their prior training in ESL, they would jump at the opportunity to put their skills to use. In actuality, the majority of them avoided lengthy conversations in English and were much more receptive to me when I made the effort to speak Japanese.

Except for Melanie, who worked at the high school level, all of my interviewees reported interactions with JTEs who were not able to converse in fluent English and seemed to be slightly frustrated by this reality. Presently, the Japanese place a great deal of importance upon the successful completion of written English exams. Perhaps MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) should consider raising the proficiency level required by English oral communication tests issued to Japanese university students wishing to obtain their certification as English teachers.

All of the ALTs I interviewed arrived in Japan with little to no Japanese language skills and agreed that their adaptation to Japanese culture was facilitated as their Japanese oral communication skills improved. This supports Cannon's (1999) claim that language ability is associated with adjustment measures. My own experience adapting to the Japanese workplace provides some evidence that such is the case. When I first arrived in Japan, I was shocked at how helpless I was due to my inability to speak Japanese. Throughout my life I have traveled to many countries in which my native or second languages were not spoken, and yet I managed to communicate and make friends fairly easily. In Japan I experienced what it means to be illiterate for the first time. I never felt as alienated as I did throughout my first two years working for JET.

In Japan, perhaps due to the vast cultural differences that functioned as interpersonal barriers, I had far more difficulty adapting to my everyday work life. I felt that my co-workers were afraid to speak with me and that they were even embarrassed for me when I would make mistakes in my struggle to communicate using basic Japanese. Over the course of my three years as an ALT my language skills improved significantly and as a result thereof I quickly started to experience an increased sense of belonging at my junior high school. My co-workers seemed relieved that I could finally speak their language, as did the Japanese students I taught. I found that by injecting the occasional Japanese word or sentence into my lessons my students would become more motivated to communicate in English, even risking the occasional mistake in order to participate in my lessons. Edward and Sharon's illustrations of their occasional use of Japanese in the classroom further emphasize the reality that leading by example (i.e., by demonstrating a willingness to speak in a foreign language) can increase the Japanese student's motivation to communicate in English.

Cannon's (1999) claim that many investigations of sojourner adjustment have tended to assign only minor importance to language ability deserves attention. This conclusion seems odd given my own experience, as well as the experiences of my research participants. Woodman (1998) is correct in her claim that one of the most unique aspects of the study-abroad experience is the immersion in the target language community by participants. In my case and the cases of my research participants, this immersion both encouraged and necessitated the development of communicative skills which were more native-like in order to survive.

Based on my own experience and the experiences of the JET participants I

interviewed, knowledge of the Japanese language is an essential aspect of the ALTs day-to-day life. Therefore, JET Program stakeholders should consider hiring more applicants with Japanese language skills, or providing them with extensive language instruction prior to their departure. If participants do not possess the ability to communicate in their future host country's language, more focused and developed classes should be offered for an extended period of time, prior to the ALT's arrival in Japan. While I attended the Japanese language classes offered by JET after my acceptance into the program, I only learned to speak basic Japanese that would allow me to introduce myself to the important members of the community I would soon enter. Upon my arrival in Japan, such classes were no longer offered. While JET does supply ALTs with language lesson books and audio CDs, perhaps an ongoing course in oral language skills offered after their arrival in Japan would be beneficial to JET participants. Practical language training throughout the ALTs Japan experience would surely facilitate the acculturation process and increase positive relationships between ALTs and JTEs.

As noted, Crump (2007) contends that JET participants are hired on the basis of their native speakership as they provide a normative model for Japanese teachers of English. She explains that such hiring practices promote monolithic, post colonial, ideologies of English and do little to increase effective learning in the Japanese classroom. It is important to note that four out of five of my interviewees were born in Quebec and speak English as a second language. All of them had predominantly positive experiences in the Japanese workplace and were capable of successful instruction in both English grammar and oral communication skills. While Edward, Ron, and Sharon are French-Canadian and speak accented English, at no point in the interviews did they

mention that their accents affected their teaching in any way. In fact, they had positive overall experiences. While Melanie explained that she was slightly insecure about English being her second language, she quickly got over this fear and realized that it was actually advantageous to her. The fact that these non-native speakers of English were hired by the JET Program provides evidence that opposes Crump's (2006) contention that the JET Program reinforces and propagates the native speaker myth. Perhaps program officials have begun to understand that non-native speakers of English can contribute to the education of Japanese students in new and unique ways.

McKay's (2002) insistence that more diverse speakers of English be incorporated into ESL and EIL instruction was met when Edward, Melanie, Ron and Sharon were hired by JET. Given the unique context of bilingualism within the greater Montreal area, it seems fitting that JET Program stakeholders look to the narratives of Montreal based JET participants who had positive experiences assisting with the instruction of English and promoting internationalization in Japan. Such individuals might offer living proof that the native speaker myth is a fallacy.

Fujita (2006) is correct in her claim that the roles of ALTS and JTEs in Japanese English education need to be reconsidered with a critical view towards the need for English communicative ability in Japanese society. Based on the experiences of my research participants, her conclusion that the native speaker is not an essential label is accurate. In light of my study, it seems foolish to accept the native speaker construct as a model of competence, as she suggests. Based on the successes of the French Canadian ALTs in my study it is possible to suggest that, in the future, "various English accents

should be included in the (Japanese) syllabus, textbooks and teaching materials." (Fujita, 2006, p.119)

Training Issues

As noted in chapter two, Brown and Wada (1998) suggested that JET participants who major in TESL and TEFL clearly feel more prepared for the many challenges they face as English teachers than those who majored in English literature or linguistics. In the cases of Sharon and Melanie it was clear that their prior teacher training assisted them in their adaptation to the Japanese workplace and helped to prepare them for the obstacles they encountered. They both reported high levels of job satisfaction and most of this satisfaction could be attributed to their successful relationships with co-workers. However, they deviated from their job description and acted in the capacity of lead teacher, instead of as teachers' assistants. Unlike Melanie and Sharon, Steve's prior experience and training seemed to function as more of a hindrance. This may be because his prior knowledge resulted in his adopting an overly critical approach to the Japanese educational system. It should also be noted that the Japanese educational context is difficult to compare to that of Western schools. It seems that the type of training and/or certification necessary for the ALT's success must be specifically related to team teaching practices. Perhaps JET could offer ALTs practical instruction in this domain.

My own JET experience was fraught with obstacles, many of which surfaced as a result of my insecurities as a new teacher. Untrained, with no prior teaching experience and little feedback from my JTEs, I experienced a great deal of frustration and anxiety when working at the junior high level. I have little doubt that a teacher's degree would have assisted me, especially considering that my JTEs were clear at the outset of my

employment that they had hoped for a trained ALT with prior teaching experience. I found it difficult to successfully educate my Japanese students. In hindsight, more training in assistant teaching and intercultural sensitivity would have been extremely beneficial.

If ALTs are not offered basic intercultural competence and sensitivity training prior to their placement in Japanese public schools they are likely to encounter more roadblocks throughout their JET experience based on their ignorance of Japanese customs (eg. status hierarchy) and unfamiliar pedagogical practices. Furthermore, practical training in the methods of team-taught instruction would allow them to comfortably adopt the role of assistant teacher without the ambiguity that is often associated with the ALT job. Similar training would assist JTEs in their interactions with foreign ALTs who are not aware of cultural nuances such as the Japanese potential for status violation.

Despite the advantages that context specific training might provide, it would seem that no amount thereof entirely prepares a JET participant for the drastic cultural differences that they will face upon their arrival in Japan and throughout their gradual acculturation to the Japanese way of life. Perhaps it is more a question of character and history; a personable and adaptable candidate with extensive intercultural experience will probably have an easier time navigating the course of their new employment than a trained teacher who has never experienced immersion in a completely foreign culture. Thus, besides striving to employ ALTs with knowledge of the Japanese language, perhaps the JET Program should seek out applicants with extensive intercultural experience and work histories that demonstrate their adaptability and open mindedness.

It is also important to note, that as Ron and Edward's narratives suggest, much of the experience required for an ALT's success in the Japanese workplace is learned. The professional development that takes place throughout the course of their contract may have the effect of honing the teaching skills of a new generation of educators who will return to their own countries more capable than they were upon their departure to Japan. Such is the case for JTEs, as well. No amount of training can prepare them for the real life experience of working alongside an ALT whose language and culture is so vastly different from their own. This is not to say that training for both parties should not be offered – surely it would assist in reducing the anxiety born of unfamiliar intercultural encounters.

Recommendations

More effort is needed to transform Japan into a truly international community. (Kowner, 2002) Given its mission to assist in internationalization efforts, the JET Program would benefit from further research into the roles of its primary purveyors of internationalism: the ALTs. It would also be worthwhile for JET Program officials to investigate the actual roles that ALTs assume over the course of their time in Japan, and how these roles may conflict with their outlined job description. More attention needs to be paid to ways in which ALTs' roles as cultural ambassadors can be further actualized so that they take precedence over their roles as English language teachers. A revision of the term ALT should be considered given that the mandates of JET participants stretch far beyond those of an assistant language teacher.

A call for more studies of ALTs' sense of belonging within the Japanese workplace might serve to highlight areas in which junior high schools across Japan might

better welcome their guest teachers. The perspectives of ALTs are crucial if the program is to improve over the years to come.

My study has revealed that positive relationships between JTEs and ALTs are essential to the ALTs success within the workplace. It is important that stakeholders address the way in which these positive relationships are linked to the attainment of the goals outlined by JET. A good first step would be to focus on improving the team teaching practices of ALTs and JTEs who function as the driving force of the JET Program mandates and its propagation of EIL in Japan.

As Carless and Walker (2005) demonstrate, a call for more reporting of good practices of collaboration between stakeholders such as JTEs and ALTs can provide potential for ongoing improvement of team teaching. If Japan plans to expand its foreign labor force, opening its doors will not be enough. As Komisarof (2009) writes, attention must be paid to the intercultural communication skills of both parties and training is highlighted as a valuable option. Collaborations such as those that take place between the JTE and ALT will have a positive impact on Japan's EIL learning processes as long as there are sufficient sensitivities, both cultural and interpersonal, and that each party is able to show some respect and actual accommodation for the views and actions of their counterparts.

Further research comparing the experiences of trained and untrained ALTs would be beneficial to the JET program's key stakeholders and would assist with the recruitment of capable ALTs. While my study does not offer any conclusions regarding the success rates of ALTs with prior teacher training compared to those without, it does demonstrate that the key to success within the Japanese workplace may be very

dependent upon the context of the ALT's placement.

Finally, an investigation into the successes of non-native speakers of English hired by the JET Program might serve to dispel the native speaker myth outlined by Crump (2006) and encourage JET officials to hire more ALTs with profiles similar to those of my French Canadian research participants.

While my research has not provided conclusive answers to all of the questions posed throughout this study, it has offered insight into aspects of the ALT's job that need be addressed. My study suggests that the dual nature of the ALTs job description is problematic in that some ALTs tend to prioritize one of their roles (language teacher or cultural ambassador) over the other. This can be a result of their JTEs' expectations or because of their own understanding of the JET mandates.

While the ALTs role as cultural ambassador is inadvertently fulfilled as a result of their presence in the Japanese workplace, the majority of the ALTs in my study agreed that their roles as English teachers took precedence. My study illustrates that ALTs, regardless of their successes and failures, contribute to an increase in their Japanese students' motivation to study a foreign language and to improve their English communicational skills. Furthermore their enjoyment of EIL seems to be heightened as a result of their frequent encounters with their ALT.

It would seem that ALTs are most effective as English language teachers given two conditions: first, they must be capable of fostering successful team teaching relationships with their JTEs, and second, they must possess basic Japanese language skills which they can use during team-taught lessons. Based on the perceptions of my research participants, more training in the fields of team teaching and intercultural

sensitivity would be beneficial to the ALT's successful acculturation to the Japanese workplace. In addition, it would seem that prior teaching experience is not necessarily equated with positive experiences on the part of ALTs working for JET. In fact, trained teachers may have adverse reactions to or be overly critical of Japanese pedagogical practices based on their familiarity with the pedagogical practices of their native country. Ultimately, my research suggests that the dual nature of the ALTs job description affects the practice of English instruction in Japanese junior high schools in a variety of ways. Given the JET Program's *raison d'être*, more attention should be paid to developing the ambassadorial aspect of the ALT's job description.

Conclusion

Looking back on my experience as a JET Program participant fills me with a wealth of conflicting emotions. My time spent as an ALT was fraught with trials, challenges, accomplishments, frustrations, joys, uncertainties, and above all else, questions , many of which remain unanswered to this day. When I initially applied for the ALT position through JET, I intended to embark upon a new adventure with the aim of discovering the inner workings of a culture completely unlike my own. After a yearlong bout with the most intense culture shock I have experienced in my lifetime, I began to perceive a glimmer of what lay beneath the surface of the Japan I had imagined prior to my departure.

I saw my struggle to adapt to the Japanese workplace, and even to my every day life in Tsubasa Machi, as a challenge that needed to be overcome. I was fascinated by the inner workings of a country that I was beginning to call home. Determined to adapt, I re-contracted for a second year with JET and shortly thereafter met the woman I would

come to call my wife. Two years turned into three, and before my JET experience came to an end, I decided to propose to her. She agreed to leave her homeland and travel to Canada, by my side. We currently reside in Montreal but plan on returning to Japan at some point in the near future.

While the completion of my thesis has been an enormous challenge given the course that my life has taken over the last two years, it has been a pleasure to recall my Japanese experience and attempt to shed light on some of the questions that arose throughout my time as an ALT, questions which have continued to perplex me since my return to Montreal. It was an honor and privilege to share my own experiences with dynamic individuals whose narratives complimented my own. I learned a great deal by listening to the insightful perspectives that surfaced throughout the interview process and throughout the time I spent analyzing the data yielded by the interviews.

There is no doubt that further research into the perspectives of ALTs is necessary if the JET Program wishes to evolve and improve over the years to come. My study has contributed to the current body of literature by drawing attention to new and unique perspectives shared by a select group of former ALTs who lived and worked in high schools and junior high schools across Japan. I hope that this study will be beneficial to JET Program officials, and to future ALTs embarking upon what is sure to be a profoundly transformative experience in Japan.

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Appendix A

Participant Consent Form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN "An Examination of Assistant Language Teachers' (ALTs') perspectives on their roles as English language teachers in Japan based on case studies of four ALTs"

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by Joseph W. Allen of the Department of Education of Concordia University as a requirement of a Masters of Arts degree.

I have been informed that the research is being conducted to gain insight into the perspectives of ALTs and that the thesis composed will be submitted to Concordia University and may serve as the basis of articles for publication in professional journals. I am aware that my personal information will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be employed whenever reference is made to names, institutions and locations, in the final research document.

I understand that the interviews will take approximately an hour-and-a-half. I am also willing to answer further questions for clarification as a follow up after the transcript of this first interview has been reviewed.

I understand that my participation in this research is meant to enhance the overall JET experience for ALTs and that it is not being used in any way to assess my position as an employee of the JET program.

I understand that even if I decide to participate at this time, I can reconsider in the future and withdraw from the study if I do not wish to continue. I agree to personally inform the researcher Mr. Joseph W. Allen (514-582-5099 – joseph.w.m.allen@gmail.com) and or his advisor Prof. Arpi Hamalian (514-848-2424/ext.2014) – arpiham@alcor.concordia.ca) of any decision to do so. In such circumstance, all of the data I have contributed will be promptly removed from the study.

Date:_____

Print name (First name, last name):_____
Signature: _____

Appendix B

Preliminary Interview Questions for ALTs

1. Tell me about your experience as an ALT.

2. Can you tell me a bit about the JET program's mission statement/goals?

3. Can you describe your role as an ALT? What did/does your job involve?

4. Which aspect of your job took precedence: your role as a language teacher or your role in assisting internationalization within the Japanese classroom?

5. In what ways was your role as an assistant English teacher fulfilling?

6. In what ways was your role as a cultural ambassador fulfilling?

7. I'm going to ask you about your satisfaction and dissatisfaction in the workplace.
   -Let's begin with ways in which you were satisfied in your job.
   -How about ways in which you were dissatisfied in your job?

8. How did your instruction of English motivate your students to study English?

9. How did you promote internationalism and how did it motivate your students to take an interest in foreign culture?

10. I want you to think back to your time spent teaching in Japanese junior high-schools. Can you remember an incident in which your position as an assistant language teacher was compromised or exemplified? Tell me about it.

11. How would you describe the perception of your role by the JTEs with whom you were paired?
    -- At the beginning of your assignment?
    -- Towards the end of your assignment?
    -- What did you learn from the JTEs about their expectations of an ALT?
    -- How would you describe the importance of your contribution as an ALT to your JTEs' lessons?