

JALT

The Japan Association of Language Teachers

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The JALT Story

by Tom Pendergast

Tom Robb and I were talking the other day and the discussion turned to origins. The origins of JALT. Just when and where did all this begin? When does an idea take on substance?

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

Sowing the Seed (1975)

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

New Beginnings (1975)

Those of us from Kansai, however, were left with only the warm glow of our memories of the LIQJ Conference and a yearning to *do* something. Late that fall, Sharon Bode, then Chief Instructor at the Kyoto YMCA, made the first move by inviting a group of teachers to her apartment for lots of tea, cake, and good talk. I think those present at that first get-together will affirm that it seemed as if some void had been filled. There was almost a compulsive outpouring of common experiences, ideas, book titles, and "solutions." It was apparent that something was happening. There were about 15 of us at that first meeting.

We didn't have a name yet, but it was agreed that subsequent meetings should center around an informal presentation or two. At our next gathering, Sharon spoke on the logic of pictures and I gave a brief dem-

monstration of Silent Way Japanese. By the third meeting, we had outgrown Sharon's place and began our continuing nomadic existence, always on the lookout for a suitable meeting place.

KALT (1976)

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

TESOL '76

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

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

Kanto and Tokai Chapters (1977)

David Bycina, who had gained experience helping us in KALT, moved to Tokyo early in 1977 and, together with Doug Tomlinson, put together the Kanto ALT. With this move, JALT came into at least *de facto* existence, although official recognition had to await the adoption of the constitution at the TEFL Conference held in Nagoya in November later that same year. Meanwhile, Charlie Adamson in Nagoya had gathered enough people to form the Tokai Chapter (TALT), our second for the year.

Recognition as the Official Japan Affiliate of TESOL (1977)

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

TEFL '77 (Nagoya)

With 305 members and three chapters, JALT had shown its staying power. This was our first major gathering as JALT, as 180 members spent two days attending over thirty presentations and generating renewed enthusiasm.

[to be continued]