

Global Team Teaching: Thailand / Japan Teacher Exchange

by Jim Kahny (Language Institute Of Japan, LIOJ)

This year, 10 junior and senior high school English teachers from Japan and Thailand joined our third annual LIOJ Thailand/Japan Team Teaching Exchange. Five Japanese teachers of English traveled to Thailand for two weeks during the August vacation to team teach English in Thai schools while learning firsthand about Thai education and culture. The five Thai teachers of English later returned the visit, coming to Japan during their October mid-term break. Japanese participants came from around the country--Aomori, Kanagawa, Miyagi, Osaka and Yamanashi, while Thai participants came from Bangkok, Nakhonnayok, Nakhonratcha-sima and Thonburee. The teachers gathered separately for orientation sessions in Thailand and Japan in August to discuss approaches to team teaching English, as well as Thai and Japanese education and culture.

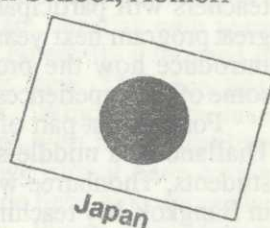
As hosts, participants opened their homes to their teaching partners, introducing them to their families and to daily life in their communities. Host teachers also welcomed their counterparts to their schools. The Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) and the Thai teachers of English (TTEs) team taught English classes in both Japan and Thailand, and the visiting teachers also conducted culture-oriented lessons in English. Visiting teachers had various opportunities to participate in school life through observing other classes, joining various club activities, and attending school festivals. The teachers, their students and the host families of the participants all gained greater awareness of, and appreciation for, the customs and culture of Thailand and Japan.

As EFL teachers in Asia, the Thai and Japanese participants were able to exchange ideas about language teaching and share their common perspectives as non-native teachers of English. For the TTEs, this project represented an introduction to English team teaching as it is practiced in Japan; for the JTEs, the program offered the chance to experience team teaching from a new perspective, that of the visiting teacher. And for teachers and their students, the unique Thai-Japanese partnership presented the opportunity to use English as an international language to promote goodwill and understanding between Thai and Japanese people.

The following is a report on her experiences from one of the Japanese teachers on the program - Ms. Junko Mukainakano, a teacher at Towada Junior High School in Aomori, Japan.

Thailand-Japan Team Teaching

by Junko Mukainakano,
Towada Junior High School, Aomori



"Ajarn Yuwadee was the first Thai person--the first person from an Asian country--I had ever met. At first I was anxious about whether we could communicate using English. Also, I knew almost nothing about Thailand. This made me a little nervous. However, once I got to know her, I realized we could understand each other despite my poor English. Sometimes my sentences did not make sense, or I couldn't catch what she said, but we could still communicate with each other. She taught us something important: even if we live in different countries and have different cultures and languages, we are the same human beings living on the earth. There are not many big differences between us. And if we try to understand with all our heart, we can understand and can share ideas. What a wonderful experience it was!" (1st grade girl)

"The word 'Thai' reminded me of 'Thai rice'. It was not a good image at all. To be honest, I was a little scared to have a Thai teacher in our class. But this two week experience with a Thai teacher totally changed my image about Thailand. Now I'm sure that I was misunderstanding Thailand. If I hadn't met her, I'm afraid that I might have my warped image about Thailand in my mind forever. I have to say I was lucky. I want to visit Thailand some day." (1st grade boy)

"We need to learn more about Asian countries and teach the right things. It is very shameful but, before this program, we did not have a good image of Thailand. However, once she came we studied a lot of things from her. There are many things we have to learn from Thailand. We will always welcome teachers from other Asian countries. Now after she left, I became keen for news from Thailand or Bangkok." (a teacher)

These were comments from students and a teacher at my school at the end of our participation in the LIOJ Thailand-Japan team teaching exchange. Through this program, both students and teachers learned many things. It was definitely a precious experience for all of us. It is not easy to get permission to host a Thai teacher at a Japanese school, but I hope more teachers will participate and benefit from this great program next year. I would like to briefly introduce how the program works and share some of the experiences I had.

For the first part of the exchange, I went to Thailand to a middle-sized school with 1,800 students, Thonburee-woratapeepalaruk School in Bangkok. My teaching partner was a woman named Yuwadee Yoosabai. My aims for teaching with a Thai teacher in a Thai school were: (1) to share the idea of team teaching in English; (2) to experience team teaching not as a host teacher, but as a visiting teacher; (3) to share teaching techniques and get ideas to improve my teaching; (4) to learn about the education system and school life in Thailand; (5) to introduce Japanese culture to Thais to promote better understanding between our cultures; (6) to give encouragement to Thai teachers and students who might usually hesitate to communicate in English.

In terms of team teaching, it was timely for my Thai English teacher colleagues to have this program. Thai public schools don't have a team teaching system and cannot employ native speakers as we do in Japan. The English department of my Thai school, however, was considering starting team teaching the following term with two Thai teachers of English. I was often asked about the team teaching system in Japan. I hope this program inspired them to begin their own style of team teaching.

As for me, I learned a lot by team teaching as a visiting teacher. In Japan, I work with native speaker assistant language teachers (ALTs) from countries such as the US and UK. But in Thailand I experienced team teaching from the other side by: (1) introducing myself as ALTs do in Japan; (2) waiting in class while the Thai teacher explained the instructions in Thai; (3) answering students' many questions as they asked me for an autograph or to write their names in Japanese; (4) discussing teaching plans which the Thai teacher had made. Since both of us had our own teaching style, we needed frank discussions to understand each other. During my two weeks I often empathized with the ALTs who work with me in Japan. Being a visiting teacher was quite a strange experience, yet I found some interesting points

which I could see only from a visiting teacher's point of view. It was a valuable experience.

For my Japanese culture class, I brought a tea ceremony set, a *yukata*, *samurai* wigs, and so on. For the first few days, most of the students seemed really shy and we had only a few volunteers for my activities. Gradually, however, they felt at ease, and many teachers and students asked to try to make green tea, or to wear the *yukata* and to take pictures. It was lovely to see Thai students bow and say some easy Japanese to me with a smile. One day after our culture class, a big group of students called to me, "*Mani, mani, Ajarn Junko!*" ("Come here, Junko sensei!" in Thai.) And suddenly they opened their arms and shouted, "*Aishiteru yo!*" ("We love you!" in Japanese.) I cannot forget their lovely, pure smiles even now.

One evening I stayed overnight with a Thai English teacher. She said she used to hesitate to speak English, but had decided to try to speak out more. Although she sometimes had trouble expressing herself, she tried hard to speak with me. That night we talked until really late - another good memory for me. Anyway, I could see peoples' minds were gradually opening up to me. Day by day, the number of people who talked with me or smiled at me grew. This feeling made me happy, and I didn't feel tired in spite of the busy schedule.

One thing I felt sad about was that sometimes I heard people say such things as, "Japan is a rich country. Japan is great. But not my country, Thailand." We language teachers teach language, but also need to communicate to students how important it is to understand others and respect customs which might be different from our own. I want my students to appreciate their own culture and country, and to appreciate other peoples, cultures and countries as well. I have come to feel more strongly about this after returning from Thailand.

Living in Thailand was really a wonderful experience for me. During my brief stay, many ideas and thoughts came to my mind. On the way back to Japan I exchanged experiences with the other Japanese exchange teachers. My mind was already preparing for the next stage, "Next, it's our turn. The next step will be team teaching in Japan. What can I do for the Thai teacher who will come? How can we involve all the students and teachers in my school in this program?"

My school, Towada Junior High, is a public school in Aomori prefecture with 640 students. When we decided to host a Thai teacher,

everyone was a little confused. The Thai teacher was an unexpected guest for our school.

We have often heard the word "internationalization". However, only a few schools have begun cultural exchanges with Asian countries through connections such as sister cities or sister schools. There was no doubt that Thailand was an unfamiliar country to people at our school. Therefore, our priorities became: (1) to create a welcome atmosphere among students and teachers; and (2) to increase people's interest in and awareness of Thailand and Thai culture. Before the Thai teacher arrived, I introduced her to our teachers and students in a newsletter and taught them one Thai word, "Sawadee" (Hello).

The first day for Yuwadee at our school was a Monday. When she arrived at school, two boys came up to her and said, "Sawadee". I felt it was a good start! Since we had a mid-term test on her first day, I wanted Yuwadee and the teachers to get to know each other.

Earlier that morning, we had gotten up early to prepare Yuwadee's self-introduction in Japanese.

This Japanese speech worked well. On her first day she made a "Thai corner" at school using posters and pictures. Soon after, it was crowded with many students. She wrote her first newsletter and delivered it to teachers and students. It didn't take long for her to become famous! She was soon accepted and loved by everyone. But the real reason for her success was her warm-hearted character.

We organized Thai culture classes every day so that all seventeen classes had the chance to learn about Thai culture. In her lessons, Yuwadee wore Thai costume and danced a Thai dance to traditional music. Many teachers who had time also joined and practiced Thai dance.

We made newsletters every day and included "Today's Thai Word" so that everyone could learn one new Thai word each day. By the third day, some students and teachers had begun to greet her in Thai. In class, it was lovely to see students greeting her with a *wai* and a "Sawadee" in unison at the start of the lesson.

Before this program started, most teachers at our school rarely spoke in front of English-speaking people. They gradually started to communicate in English with the Thai teacher, however. Sometimes they would rely on me to communicate with Yuwadee, but if I pretended

to be busy they would eventually communicate on their own in some way.

Near the end of her stay, Yuwadee cooked Thai food for the teachers. Many teachers kindly helped her cook. During her two-week stay, teachers and students often socialized with her.

In our school, we usually have team teaching with three different ALTs once or twice a month. The students are familiar with team taught lessons, but were especially interested in the lessons with their new Thai teacher. Yuwadee often told them, "Why don't you take advantage of your lessons with native English speakers? In Thailand, we cannot have native English speakers as you do here. You are really

lucky. Please don't forget that. Study harder. You can become better at English!"

Since I also wanted the Thai teacher to know about the team teaching system in Japan, we invited the city ALTs to our school during her stay. On one occasion, we had six English teachers—four native speaker ALTs, Yuwadee and me—in one class. After this class, in which students practiced communicative activities, we

received many interesting comments from students.

* "We had Canadian, Australian, Thai and Japanese teachers. They are different nationalities, but they understand each other by using English! Wow, English is such a useful language!"

* "Each teacher speaks in a different way. Even if they come from the same country, their way of speaking English is different. Even so, English is English. The teachers communicate very naturally. I almost forgot they came from different countries. How interesting!"

* "I felt like I was in another country. There were many foreigners and English was everywhere in the room. It was a very strange but interesting feeling."

* "Sometimes I couldn't understand the meaning, but I still could enjoy the lesson."

* "Well, my English is not so bad. It works!"

It seemed that students realized that English could be a valuable tool for international communication. This was one of the positive results from this program.

On the last day of her stay, the teachers prepared a warm farewell ceremony for the Thai



teacher. It was great to see the team effort between the teachers and students. I recalled the welcome ceremony two weeks earlier. At that time, I had to ask some teachers and students to help with preparation. But after two weeks, the teachers and students were eager to help and they organized everything on their own. By the time I thought about the farewell ceremony, teachers and students had already finished preparations. I came to the conclusion that our team teaching in Japan had been a great success.

Even now, students still use some Thai words and ask about Yuwadee. Many of them ask when the next Thai teacher will come. The other day, when I was talking with parents, they commented, "The Thai teacher gave my son/daughter a lasting impression." There were suggestions to continue the relationship between our school and Yuwadee's school. Our internationalization has just begun.

This team teaching exchange project is organized annually by the Language Institute of Japan (LIOJ) and the Srinakharinwirot University Department of Linguistics. For further information, contact:

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The Partnership Stories Project



The Partnership Stories Project is an international network of teachers interested in building life-long bridges among cultures through international collaborative story writing. The process, briefly, is that students in one country write half of a story which is then completed by students of another country. The project began in 1988 when an American elementary school class in Vermont sent off a story which was completed by Russian school children in Simferopol. Since then, partnership stories have been co-written by classes in countries as varied as Kenya, Korea, Mexico, Iceland, China, Sweden and Sri Lanka.

Each project story starts with a class of students in one country who write the first part of the story, choosing a problem or conflict which will later be resolved by their partner class in another country. In addition to writing half of a story, participants often draw pictures to accompany the story and sometimes choose to send photos of themselves, cassette tapes with their voices and brief auto-biographies. The project can be adapted to any age or grade.

The partnership stories which students produce are delightful to read and a joy to share. More importantly, however, they are vehicles through which children and young people can learn of other lands, other peoples, other values and other interests. The project aims to achieve 5 key educational objectives: to enhance cultural and geographical awareness, to explore important social, economic, environmental questions, to engage young people's imagination, cooperation and problem-solving, to empower individuals through tapping their talents, skills and leadership abilities, and to encourage international friendships that lead to global good.

An International Directory of Story Partners has already been compiled which explains the project in detail, gives guidelines for writing stories and lists the names and addresses of over 100 teachers and groups in 30 countries who are involved in the project.

If you'd like to learn more about the project, get a copy of the directory, read some of the stories children round the world have written or join the project with your class, contact the project coordinator Jean Eisele at the address below in Washington, USA.

Anyone ready to jump right in to the project should contact Liz Sipprell, an American teacher who has 1/2 stories already written by her elementary & junior high school students which she is ready to send to Japan by email (or regular mail) for a Japanese class to complete.

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