

Talking to a Comrade: Pair Discussions between ALTs and between JTEs

同志との学び合い — ALT 同士、JTE 同士による質的ペアディスカッション手法—

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Abstract

The government-sponsored Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program has gained high acclaim, domestically and internationally. Empirical studies on the program, its assistant language teacher (ALT) participants, and their team teaching with Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) abound. It is notable, however, that the data collection methods of previous research on the subject have been limited largely to either questionnaires or semi-structured interviews. This study sheds new light on the area of scholarly inquiry (i.e., perspectives of ALTs and JTEs) by employing and discussing a unique data collection method: pair discussions between ALTs and between JTEs. It was revealed that the focus of the pair discussions between ALTs was on JTEs in general and their JTEs in particular, whereas the JTEs used their pair discussion opportunity to exchange opinions and share experiences about multifaceted matters concerning their schools.

Key words : Pair discussion, ALTs, JTEs, Professional development, JET program

概 要

語学指導等を行う外国青年招致事業（JET プログラム）は国内外から高く評価を受け、プログラムや参加者また外国語指導助手（ALT）と日本人英語教師（JTE）によるチームティーチングに関する研究が現在まで盛んに行われてきた。しかしながらそれらの研究の多くは、質問用紙やインタビューを研究手法として用いている。本研究では研究の幅を広げるため、ALT 同士、JTE 同士のペアディスカッション手法に着目し、それぞれのディスカッションの内容を比較・検証した。その結果、ALT は主にティーチングパートナーである JTE に関して、一方 JTE は学校全般における多様なトピックに関して話し合う傾向にあることが明らかとなった。

キーワード：ペアディスカッション、外国語指導助手、日本人英語教師、教師教育、JET プログラム

Introduction

In Japan, the grammar and translation method received widespread support in the late Meiji period when language learning was viewed primarily as an intellectual pursuit for logical reasoning and cultivating the mind. However, the method turned out to be ineffective when it came to authentic communication with English speakers (Friedman, 2016). After years of trial and error, Japan appeared to have found a promising solution to the problem: the employment of a communication-oriented approach in English lessons. One example of the systematic effort to incorporate the approach in the classroom was the government-sponsored Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) program through which a large number of young college graduates from around the world are invited to Japan to enhance foreign language education and to promote internationalization at the local level (CLAIR, 2020). It was launched in 1987 and has been acknowledged as the “best documented team teaching program” (Medgyes, 2001, p. 439) and as “one of the world’s largest exchange programs” (Metzgar, 2017, p. 2), with its participants growing from 848 from 4 countries to 5761 from 57 countries in 2019. One of the positions, the assistant language teacher (ALT), comprises more than 90% of the current JET participants. Their typical duties are team teaching language classes with Japanese teachers, assisting in the preparation of teaching materials, and participating in extra-curricular activities with students (CLAIR, 2020). Although there are a few ALTs (less than 5 %) who teach foreign languages other than English, including Chinese, German, Korean, and Russian, the majority of ALTs offer English language instruction in public schools, in tandem with Japanese teachers of English (JTEs). This particular cohort (i.e., ALTs of English) and their teaching partner, JTEs, are the center of attention in this article.

The study on which this article is based inquired into the perceptions of ALTs and JTEs through the means of pair discussions between JTEs and between ALTs. Although numerous scholars have investigated the perceptions of ALTs and JTEs on a plethora of issues thus far, such as the advantages/disadvantages of having ALTs and JTEs in team-taught lessons (e.g., Adachi, Macarthur, & Sheen, 1998; Miyazato, 2009; Sakui, 2004), the characteristics of team-teaching practices (e.g., Hasegawa, 2008; Hiramatsu, 2015; Hiratsuka, 2013, 2015b; Igawa, 2009; Roloff-Rothman, 2012; Tajino, Stewart, & Dalsky, 2016), and the roles of ALTs and JTEs (e.g., Hiratsuka, 2015a; Johannes, 2012; Mahoney, 2004; Ogawa, 2011), the methods employed in the studies have chiefly been either questionnaires or semi-structured interviews. As far as I am aware, there exists only one study heretofore that looked into the team teachers’ perceptions, using pair discussions as the main data collection method (Hiratsuka, 2017). Notwithstanding, the present study distinctly differs from Hiratsuka (2017) in that (a) the two pairs of the discussions in this study were comprised of two JTEs and of two ALTs, as opposed to the two pairs, each consisting of a JTE and an ALT, in Hiratsuka (2017) and (b) this study concentrated on the nature and the content of the team teachers’ pair discussions from a methodological viewpoint, rather than delving into the characteristics of the team teachers’ reflective practice during the pair discussions, as in the case of Hiratsuka (2017).

As a result of the data analysis within this study, two independent and contrasting categories were generated: (a) The ALTs’ agenda—JTEs and (b) The JTEs’ agenda—Various school matters. The present study thus contributes to the scholarly inquiry into team teaching in Japan by putting a spotlight on the particular data collection method: pair discussions between ALTs and between JTEs.

Literature Review

According to CLAIR (2020), the JET program, which endorses team teaching by ALTs and JTEs in Japan, has successfully received high acclaim, both domestically and internationally, for its role in facilitating mutual understanding between the people of Japan and the people of other countries. With a steady period of growth since the outset of the program in 1987, it also attracted great empirical attention. Broadly speaking, a sizable number of the previous discussion and studies on the topic concern three major strands. The first strand is the advantages/disadvantages of the team teachers (e.g., Adachi, Macarthur, & Sheen, 1998; Miyazato, 2009; Sakui, 2004). For instance, Miyazato's (2009) qualitative case study illustrated, via the use of interviews and observations, that the ALTs were considered to be linguistic experts in the target language (English) and granted full autonomy in the classroom, but they were at the same time regarded as cultural novices in the local culture and lacked political power owing to their status as assistants. In contrast, the JTEs were viewed to be linguistic novices in the target language but cultural and occupational experts in the local culture; therefore, they were expected to play the crucial roles of linguistic, cultural, and psychological mediators in order to fill the gaps between students and ALTs in the classroom (Miyazato, 2009).

The second strand is the characteristics of team-teaching practices (e.g., Hasegawa, 2008; Hiramatsu, 2015; Hiratsuka, 2013, 2015b; Igawa, 2009; Roloff-Rothman, 2012; Tajino, Stewart, & Dalsky, 2016). For example, Hiramatsu (2005) recruited eight JTEs and one ALT from an academic high school and conducted interviews and class observations to examine the JTEs' and ALT's perceptions of team-teaching practices. The results indicated that (a) the insufficient English proficiency of JTEs impeded efficient communication with ALTs; (b) team teaching could be either a threat or stimulus, depending on JTEs' confidence with their English; (c) there were rigid team-teaching routines; and (d) there were few opportunities for teachers to build collegiality. The final strand of the previous research involving JTEs' and ALTs' perceptions is the roles of team teachers (e.g., Hiratsuka, 2015a; Johannes, 2012; Mahoney, 2004; Ogawa, 2011). Mahoney (2004), for instance, collected questionnaire data from over 1,400 junior and high school JTEs and ALTs nationwide in order to scrutinize the perceptions of their own role and the team-teaching partner's role. While respondents generally concurred on the main roles expected of themselves and their partners (e.g., ALTs as models, demonstrators, and informants of natural English and authentic English culture; JTEs as managers and intermediators inside the classroom and teaching-plan makers outside the classroom), discrepancies did arise regarding other, less commonly perceived roles (e.g., ALTs as chief classroom manager; JTEs as assistants to ALTs). Particularly germane to the present study apart from the three main strands is that of Hiratsuka (2017). The crux of his study was the participating team teachers' reflection on and for their teaching, using pair discussions between an ALT and a JTE. The discussions included stimulated recall procedures whereby the participants observed key extracts from the videorecording of their team-taught lessons. The findings suggested that the stimulating pair discussions between the ALT and the JTE aided them in realizing, inspecting, and challenging their educational philosophies, principles, and theories.

As can be seen, it is notable that previous studies of team teachers' perceptions in Japan have not included pair discussion procedures between JTEs and between ALTs as the main data collection method, let alone given consideration to the important implications of the method about the outcome of the research. Thus, my attempt in this study is to fill the gap in the literature by elucidating the nature and the contents of the particular pair discussions (between JTEs and between ALTs) as well as exploring

the ramifications of the discussion method for the research results. The guiding research questions underpinning this study were: (a) What are the main themes found in the pair discussions between JTEs and between ALTs? and (b) What are the differences between the two types of discussions, if any?

Methodology

The participants in this study were: a male ALT, Matt, and a female JTE, Aitani, who worked together as teaching partners at Sakura High School as well as a male ALT, Sam, and a female JTE, Takahashi, who were team teaching at Tsubaki High School (the names of participants and schools are pseudonyms). The schools were Japanese public senior high schools located in northern Japan. Matt arrived in Japan, through the JET program, four months prior to the beginning of data collection for this study. He was teaching at 8 different schools and working with 17 JTEs in total. Aitani had considerable teaching experience (25 years), having taught at 4 schools with 13 different ALTs. Sam had lived in Japan for 4 months at the time of data collection, just like Matt, and was working at 3 different schools with 13 different JTEs. Takahashi had worked at 4 different schools with 10 different ALTs over the course of her 24-year teaching career.

As part of a larger study (see Hiratsuka & Barkhuizen, 2015), the participants took part in a practitioner research experience in the form of collaborative Exploratory Practice (EP) (Allwright, 2003, 2005, 2009; Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Gieve & Miller, 2006; Yoshida, Imai, Nakata, Tahjino, Takeuchi, & Tamai, 2009). EP is an inclusive, sustainable practitioner research which aims not to treat participating teachers and students as research subjects, sources of data, or even cooperative generators of data. Instead, it views both teachers and learners as full participants in the research process and outcome (Allwright, 2009). In the realm of EP, all the participants strive to explore their 'puzzles' rather than seek to solve 'problems' in the classroom by drawing on their particular knowledge and experience (Hanks, 2017). The participants' EP endeavor continued over four months and included two types of teacher pair discussions. The first type of pair discussions was between an ALT and a JTE (i.e., between Matt and Aitani and between Sam and Takahashi). The discussions were carried out three times at their respective schools (see Hiratsuka, 2017). On the other hand, the second type of pair discussions was between ALTs and between JTEs from different schools (i.e., between Matt and Sam and between Aitani and Takahashi). These discussions were held three times at a neutral venue (i.e., a community center, a language satellite center, and a rental space), and this second type of pair discussions is the focus of this article.

I imagined that the second type of teacher pair discussions would be valuable to the participants for undertaking the EP endeavor at least for three reasons. Firstly, each teacher was expected to have a chance to talk about their experiences specifically regarding their status, namely, experiences as an ALT and as a JTE. Secondly, they were encouraged to openly state feelings and opinions which they might feel reluctant to reveal in front of their team-teaching partner. Furthermore, as previous studies affirmed (e.g., Hiramatsu, 2005; Hiratsuka, 2015a; Miyazato, 2009), ALTs and JTEs had had communication problems with their teaching partner due to the lack of the appropriate competence of their second language (i.e., ALTs' Japanese and JTEs' English proficiencies). It can be therefore inferred that it is beneficial for the ALTs to talk to each other and the JTEs to talk to each other in order to exchange their detailed experiences in their respective mother tongues. Within this particular study, therefore, I let the participants choose the language to be used (i.e., either English or Japanese), depending on the participants' preferences. Interestingly, the JTEs chose to use English for their second discussion. Partly guided by preformed questions (e.g., "Describe your experience with the EP so far"; "Please share and discuss your team-teaching experiences"; and "What

would you like to achieve in the future classes and in the remaining EP experience?”), each discussion continued for about half an hour. As the three discussions for each pair took place in separate rooms or in different hallways, albeit on the same days, their conversations were not heard by the other pair. In order to avoid the situation where the participants were unwittingly influenced, the interactions were either videotaped or audiotaped without my presence.

I transcribed the video clips and audio recordings, and translated the Japanese data into English, at the research sites. Bearing in mind the research questions, I analyzed the data inductively by employing a content analytic approach which enables researchers to generate and synthesize codes, and search for patterns amongst these to formulate categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). As a consequence of this analysis, two main categories that characterize the contents of the teachers' pair discussions were established (see Appendix for examples of initial coded transcript pages). They were: (a) ALTs' agenda—JTEs and (b) JTEs' agenda—Various school matters.

Findings

ALTs' agenda—JTEs

Overwhelmingly, the focus of the pair discussions between ALTs was on JTEs in general and their JTEs in particular. This is quite intriguing, given that the ALTs were specifically asked, in the pair discussions as part of the EP endeavor, to share their EP and team-teaching experiences and prospects (see “Methodology”). The finding is also interesting, considering that the JTEs who similarly took part in their pair discussions spent time, not so much on talking about their ALTs or ALTs in general but on sharing their multiple concerns at school (see “JTEs' agenda—Various school matters” below). For example, during their first pair discussion the ALTs exchanged stories about the JTEs they worked with (not those in this study) who, in their opinion, failed to efficiently facilitate communication in the classroom.

Sam: There is one teacher, oh my god ... he sometimes doesn't understand what I say, so I have had lessons that have gone perfectly in my four other classes, and ... I ask him to explain something, and he couldn't, and it's like nobody can do it, and we are all lost.... It's real, real rough.

Matt: Yes, I have had that lesson before. It's an up-hill battle all the way.

(First ALT Pair Discussion)

In spite of the findings in the previous studies that many ALTs and students appreciated their JTEs performing the roles of intermediators as Japanese-English bilinguals in the classroom (e.g., Hiratsuka, 2015a; Mahoney, 2004), the ALTs in this study noted challenges they encountered with some JTEs. In the minds of ALTs, JTEs were expected to assist the progress of communication for everyone in the classroom by translating English into Japanese, and vice versa. It seemed as though their lessons would not proceed smoothly unless JTEs could act as a bridge between ALTs and students because JTEs were de facto the only bilinguals in the room.

Furthermore, the ALTs discussed that their team-teaching schedules sometimes depended on JTEs' changing feelings. Sam commented: “whether I have first-year classes or not really depends on if the teacher [JTE] is feeling like having me, so it varies” (First ALT Pair Discussion). As a result of this inconsistency, Matt admitted that it was not possible for him to remember every student's name. Sam further confessed that he was not in a position to be able to critique the behaviors of his students in a

serious manner. These token practices of ALTs at the mercy of JTEs' discretion, occurred, more or less, in all the schools where Sam worked. Sam explained to Matt his experience from one of his schools: "I go 10 minutes to each class in that school.... I go to three different classes within each period and do like one 10-minute activity, so I basically teach the same, mildly boring activity six times" (First ALT Pair Discussion). Matt exclaimed: "Only 10 minutes! What the hell can you do in 10 minutes?" Sam continued:

What I have been doing is I pick news articles ... and I rewrite it, and then we will do a listening activity.... And then, next class I do it again and next class and next class ... it's very boring, very boring, but ... everything is so structured there, and you are asked to fit in whatever they [JTEs] want.

(First ALT Pair Discussion)

In the second pair discussion, Matt and Sam continued talking about JTEs. They were acutely aware of how hectic JTEs' lives were. They could not help but express their surprise at the heavy workloads of JTEs and voiced their concern about the lifestyle of JTEs:

Sam: They [JTEs] do clubs late every day. For some people, that is not as feasible.... I mean, you've got to have a life outside of it, your life, your wife, and your kids.

Matt: Fathers [JTEs] have a different approach to how much time they should spend with their family here ... they are at school from 7 to 7 ... even the moms, they work such long hours. It's just intense.

(Second ALT Pair Discussion)

It has been acknowledged that JTEs work incredibly hard, and their time and energy seem to be always under pressure (e.g., Hiramatsu, 2005; Hiratsuka, 2015b). This appeared to affect the communication between the ALTs in this study and their JTEs. The ALTs had a feeling that there was not sufficient time available to them for meaningful interaction with their JTEs in order to conduct successful team-taught lessons. What warrants particular attention here is that the ALTs in fact did not know exactly what the JTEs were busy with and why they worked in such an intense manner at the expense of spending time with their family and friends outside of school. The working style of the JTEs was beyond the understanding of the ALTs.

In the same discussion, Sam also cast doubt on the usefulness of his presence for student learning. He provided an episode from his English club, showcasing frustration with his JTEs:

I've been in English club, but we meet sporadically. So, what it normally comes down to is we talk or we play easy games because they [JTEs] don't normally inform me enough time to plan anything. For a few times, I got excited and planned assignments, they were like, "No, no, no, you can't use that". I was like, "OK. I will do something else". And they were like, "Yeah, we did the apple bobbing for Halloween the other day. How about that?" So, I got all the stuff, like apples and things. Then I got there, and they were like, "No one is coming today".

(Second ALT Pair Discussion)

Sam's feeling of frustration is palpable from the episode. The episode also illustrates how, as an assistant, Sam was treated as unimportant by his JTEs and could not effectively contribute to the English learning of his students even if he wanted. During the third pair discussion with Matt, referring to the classroom

practices, Sam expressed both his grateful attitudes towards some JTEs and his growing discontent at others in different schools:

Takahashi is, I mean, everyone at Tsubaki is much different, non-traditional.... She would disregard [what is in the textbook], but I know some teachers would be like, "It's in the textbook!" ... if they see it in the textbook, "Oh, today's topic is cloning, and we use these phrases". And the whole lesson would be about cloning, and it's not useful at all.

(Third ALT Pair Discussion)

According to Sam, thus, the team-taught classes conducted with Takahashi and those at Tsubaki were more flexible than JTEs in other schools who tended to adhere strictly to the syllabus and textbooks. In the third pair discussion with Sam, in effect, Matt theorized about three types of JTEs based on his experience: (a) JTEs who just follow the textbook and focus only on the grammar; (b) JTEs who completely diverge from the track of the textbook and include more cultural issues; and (c) JTEs who are willing to play diversified roles and introduce a variety of activities, culturally-related or not.

Hence, the pair discussions between ALTs seemed to have prompted the ALTs in this study, as fellow members of the same ALT community, to engage freely in discussions about their JTEs' weaknesses that they encountered, their JTEs' lifestyles of which they disapproved, their JTEs' episodes in which they were disappointed, and their JTEs' pedagogic characteristics about which they theorized. This is a unique finding, something that might not have otherwise surfaced as part of the data if other data collection methods (e.g., pair discussions between an ALT and a JTE from the same school and focus group discussions among ALTs and JTEs) were employed (see Hiratsuka, 2014, 2017).

JTEs' agenda—Various school matters

In contrast to the ALTs who concentrated on the topic of JTEs during their pair discussions, the JTEs used the pair discussion opportunity to exchange opinions and share experiences about multifaceted matters in their schools, including classroom pedagogies, team-teaching methods, their colleagues, homeroom duties, and committee responsibilities. For instance, the first part of their first pair discussion revolved mainly around the use of Japanese in their lessons:

Aitani: I have tried to use English as much as possible in my lessons, but my attempts have often failed. As soon as my students showed negative attitudes towards my English-only lessons, I got back to the old teaching style, using Japanese as a clutch. I had these experiences again and again.

Takahashi: It takes time to have successful English-only lessons, doesn't it?

(First JTE Pair Discussion)

I would argue that this exchange would not have happened if the JTE discussion partner was an ALT. ALTs are not hired as educators but as language experts and oftentimes lack teaching qualifications and/or experiences (see CLAIR, 2020; Mahoney, 2004; Miyazato, 2009); therefore, ALTs might not be a suitable discussion partner, at least in the eyes of JTEs, to bounce around ideas about certain classroom pedagogies that JTEs might have been unsure of or struggling with in the Japanese language education context (e.g., English-only lessons). In other words, the contextualized idea exchange likely occurred because the JTEs were both bilinguals of Japanese and English in their workplaces and shared similar experiences as full-

time teachers within the Japanese education system.

Later in their first pair discussion, the conversation shifted to the history and the significance of team teaching in English classrooms across Japan:

Aitani: What do you think about team-taught classes? Should they be different from our usual solo classes?

Takahashi: Well, when ALTs first came to the school, about 10 years ago or so, I remember that team teaching was treated as something very special. But, recently, everybody employs the team-teaching approach, even elementary schools, right? So, it does not have to be so special anymore?

(First JTE Pair Discussion)

It is probable that this exchange took place because the JTE's discussion partner was also a JTE, not an ALT. Certainly, the JTEs would not frame and ask such a question (i.e., "Should team-taught classes be different from JTEs' solo classes?") to their ALT when they know their ALTs have a limited understanding about their solo classes (see Hiratsuka, 2015b). It is also noteworthy that, during the discussion, the JTEs engaged in a conversation on team teaching itself, rather than on their teaching partner ALTs. The fact that they both knew that they were veteran JTEs in the similar educational contexts within the same prefecture seemed imperative in the light of the particular communication they had. As a matter of fact, the JTEs spent quite a long time in the discussion, speaking of a particular JTE who was working with Takahashi at the time of the discussion:

Takahashi: (*Teacher Name*) worked with you before, right? She is a very nice teacher.

Aitani: Yes! When she was in our school, she was the one who was in charge of making English lesson plans. She is very good at teaching English.

(Second JTE Pair Discussion)

The JTEs were therefore afforded with the insider information and shared knowledge as the members of the same teacher community. It is no surprise that the JTEs referred to their common JTE who then became the main topic of their conversation. Conversely, however, it is hard to envision that the JTEs would have done so if the discussion partner was an ALT because JTEs and ALTs neither belong to the same professional communities nor possess similar backgrounds or knowledge at work.

As the ALTs in this study perceived, moreover, the JTEs were constantly occupied with work unrelated to classroom English teaching, such as managing general school affairs, the curriculum, student discipline, and student guidance (see "ALTs' agenda—JTEs"). The following remark made by Takahashi at the start of the third pair discussion between JTEs showcased how hectic the JTEs felt dealing with non-English matters on a day-to-day basis: "There are just so many things to do at this time of the year involving homerooms. I am overwhelmed!" (Third JTE Pair Discussion). Their conversation continued at length around the topic of work commitments they had that were irrelevant to English teaching, such as teacher transfer procedures, orientations for new first-year students, and items to be ordered for the new school year. Takahashi concluded that the job of JTEs is "quite chaotic" (Third JTE Pair Discussion). With such a considerable amount of her work being unrelated to teaching English, it was not uncommon for Takahashi to forget that she was actually an *English language* teacher: "Almost 100% of the time, my work focuses on students' lives rather than their English. So, I am glad to have had this opportunity [experiencing the EP

project] and realize: 'Oh yeah, I am an English teacher. That's right!'" (Third JTE Pair Discussion). Without hesitation, therefore, the JTEs were confessing to each other in their discussions their time constraints and heavy workloads, thereby their communication becoming personal and reaching intimate levels. This candid conversation seemed to be predicated on the fact that they both shared the same experiences as fully-fledged teachers in the Japanese public education system. They were comfortable and felt safe in telling, and sometimes even overtly complaining, one another their challenging situations.

Toward the end of their third pair discussion, the JTEs discussed the best teaching methods for their English lessons back and forth in rapid-fire manner:

Aitani: Do you check newly introduced words first or later?

Takahashi: In reading classes, later.

Aitani: What about English I or English II courses?

Takahashi: When I want the students to improve their reading comprehension, later.

Aitani: OK, later. What about in writing classes?

Takahashi: In writing classes, I leave it up to my students. However, I tell them not to use Japanese-English dictionaries too often.

(Third JTE Pair Discussion)

Aitani was eager to find out the timing of the introduction of new vocabulary items to the students, according to the different reading and writing courses as well as the purpose of the lessons. Takahashi had firm beliefs about the right ways to teach English to their students. They appeared to be principally concerned with effective teaching behaviors that they believed would always lead to positive learner outcomes. Thus, the pair discussion opportunity seemed to have served as a platform where the JTEs could learn new perspectives or reconfirm pre-conceived notions about teaching and learning English within their contexts with another JTE colleague from a different school.

In a similar manner to the pair discussions between ALTs, the pair discussions between JTEs appeared to have allowed the JTEs, as fellow members of the JTE community, to openly exchange their ideas and personal experiences, involving wide-ranging topics such as the use of Japanese in the classroom, the status of team-taught lessons vis-à-vis that of their solo lessons, another JTE they both knew, their busy schedules, and the best ways of teaching English for their students. What is especially noteworthy concerning the JTEs' pair discussions is the absence of conversation about their own ALTs or ALTs in general. Neither did the JTEs' pair discussions cover the topic of team-teaching practices in a substantial fashion. It may be therefore construed that the nature and the content of teacher discussions are greatly dependent upon the discussion partner—whether the discussion partner is a fellow ALT/JTE or a team-teaching partner (see Hiratsuka, 2017). Also, the nature and the content of teacher discussions significantly vary, depending upon the data collection method—whether the method is pair discussion or focus group discussion (see Hiratsuka, 2014).

Discussion

As indicated above, the data suggested that the pair discussions between ALTs and between JTEs engendered divergent patterns of contents, respectively, although the pairs were both explicitly told at the beginning of their discussions to share their team-teaching and research experiences during their

EP endeavors. To be specific, while the ALTs' discussions hinged predominantly on their JTEs, ranging from their JTEs' lack of linguistic abilities to their JTEs' various styles of teaching approaches, the JTEs' discussions dealt with a myriad of issues inside the school, including their English lessons, their teaching methodologies, and their working schedules. However, what was conspicuous in the JTEs' pair discussions was the paucity of conversation about their ALTs and, to some degree, about their team-teaching practices with their ALTs. In analyzing and interpreting the dataset of this study, my intention is not to surmise that the two types of pair discussions yield qualitatively different contents all the time, or even most of the time, as I am keenly aware that multiple factors must come into play regarding the outcomes of the pair discussions between ALTs and between JTEs, such as the discussants' age, gender, nationalities, native/non-native English speaker status, teaching experience, interview places, interview durations, and interview date/day/time, to name but a few. Nonetheless, I still consider it worthwhile to underline the sharp contrast between the JTE discussions and the ALT discussions within the particular data and offer two practical implications for the professional development of JTEs and ALTs.

Firstly, on the one hand, it became transparent that the ALTs were not satisfied with their JTEs' professional performance at school and sometimes even worried about their lives in general, so much so that their conversation was almost exclusively limited to their experiences with their teaching partner JTEs. On the other hand, it was revealed that the JTEs were too busy coping with an array of school matters to the point where their conversation had virtually nothing to do with their ALTs or team teaching with their teaching partner ALTs. In order to address these issues, ALTs should be encouraged more to make and mark tests, help paper work related to English teaching and learning, and support extracurricular activities, for instance, club activities for their JTEs, as is stated in CLAIR (2020) (see also Hiratsuka, 2013). Concurrently, JTEs could familiarize themselves with effective team-teaching practices by gaining access to a collection of exemplars of team teaching in the form of video clips, audio recording, and documents from various contexts so as to become better teaching partners for ALTs and mitigate ALTs' confusion and frustrations (see also Hiratsuka & Okuma, in press).

Secondly, one of the most illuminating findings through this study was the fact that there was very few, if any, opportunity for the ALTs and the JTEs to speak to another 'comrade' from different schools. Hence, the ALTs and JTEs in the study seemed to be eager to speak with their discussion partner about a broad spectrum of, and occasionally even controversial, issues that they might have felt uncomfortable to do so otherwise. As I hoped prior to the study, for the most part, the ALTs and JTEs covered topics in their pair discussions that were relevant and unique to their positions as ALTs and JTEs, spontaneously using their first language. I attribute this result, first, to the number of discussants in the ALT discussions. That is, the ALT discussions involved only two ALTs as a pair, as opposed to, for example, the occasion at their annual ALT professional conferences in which there are usually more than 50 ALTs attending workshops and seminars en masse at any given time, thereby making it almost impossible for them to engage in personal discussions with others in order to share information about, for example, their JTEs, the nitty-gritty aspects of their teaching practices, or their lives as ALTs as a whole. I also attribute the result of this study to the optimum level of comfort and closeness that the JTEs felt for each other. In other words, the JTEs were both full-time Japanese teachers of English working for the same board of education in the same prefecture and thus know each other's situations quite well; yet, they were not working at the same school and perhaps did not have to be overly sensitive or careful when communicating with one another. The amount of 'professional space' they shared between them might have been ideal for being open and vulnerable to maximize the discussion opportunity. It seems advisable, therefore, that the pair discussions between ALTs

and between JTEs be used as part of their professional development activities. This could be in addition to, or perhaps even instead of, their current ones, which normally come just in the form of one-day or two-day workshops, often including lectures by third parties, typically university professors who lack the practical knowledge and experience of team teaching in the classroom (see also Hiratsuka & Barkhuizen, 2015).

Conclusion

This study put a spotlight on a particular qualitative data collection method, pair discussions between ALTs and between JTEs, and reported the qualitative outcome of those discussions. The discrepancy between the two pair discussions was apparent in that much of what the ALTs in this study discussed was associated with their JTEs' teaching approaches, classroom performance, and working conditions; whereas, the vast majority of the JTEs' discussion time was spent talking about miscellaneous concerns that they had as JTEs at school, including their solo English lessons, a JTE colleague, and end-of-the-year paper work. The respective pair discussions therefore initiated the participants into conversations on idiosyncratic topics that were linked to their professional status as ALTs and JTEs. These findings are in stark contrast to those of pair discussions between an ALT and a JTE (Hiratsuka, 2017) and those of focus group discussions among ALTs and JTEs (Hiratsuka, 2014). However, this result was somewhat expected from the viewpoints of an 'emic' perspective (see Anderson-Levitt, 2006) and trust. Firstly, the emic perspective is the insider's perspective, one that comes from within the same culture, situation, and circumstance. From this perspective, it is not difficult to imagine that the ALTs and the JTEs in the discussions understood that they shared the personal and local-level emic perceptions as an ALT and a JTE with their discussion partner and therefore were inclined to discuss issues immediately relating to them and their partner. Secondly, trust "promotes the sharing of ideas and thoughts between participants as well as advancing empathy for each other" and "needs to be built through increasing familiarity with each other" (Hiratsuka, 2019, p. 114). Given that the ALTs and JTEs had so much in common in terms of their professional backgrounds but at the same time had no bearing on the power relationship between them professionally, as they did not work at the same schools, it was possible that there was already an existing base of the sense of safety and the feeling of trust in their minds prior to the pair discussions, thus enabling the discussion to become ever more fruitful and pertinent.

Finally, my recommendations for future studies on pair discussions pertain particularly to conducting pair discussions (a) between an ALT and a JTE with extensive experiences as a pair and (b) between ALTs and between JTEs from the same schools. My hope is that this paper and others on pair discussions can inspire more researchers and practitioners to acquire a better understanding about both the nuances and complexities of the pair discussion methods in particular and qualitative research methods more broadly.

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Appendix: Examples of initial coded transcript pages

14 **Matt**: I had a recent conversation with a JTE who was saying ahh you know // reflectively they are doing something different, and it was working and; that is, having ALTs involved in a pure conversation, so not scripted, not from the textbook, but just conversation which would inevitably bring out the grammar which is used in the basic English, so overtime (are you evacuating?) ahh repetitive exposure to native conversation and then ahh /// bringing students into the conversation, before you were saying in terms of the activity you've done, there should be things that are relevant, using language that is interesting and likely to come up if they (are just to be used) communicate, so if you are to actually talk about whether they are interested ahh you know just a very loose of improvisation and then certainly a quite quite progressive idea particularly in this country.

15 **Sam**: Yeah I mean I think you would be more likely to remember word when you are speaking more than when you are using flash cards ten times (yeah) that's something something more relevant is something you will more likely to remember (yeah) and and especially when you get like, and Takahashi is just just she is much, I mean, all everyone at Tsubaki much different, non-traditional I guess I would say, so she would she would take like that and be like disregard, but I know some teachers would be like "It's in the textbook!" so they would be like if they see it in the textbook, "Oh, today's cloning and we use these phrases", and the whole lesson would be about cloning and it's not useful at all.

16 **M**: Yeah most teachers ahh if I think about it, /// there are three sort of categories of I could put teachers' // attitudes into and one is just following textbook (yeah just), just only using the grammar in the textbook, only you know everything in the textbook, maybe slightly original but still relies on exactly what's in the textbook because I guess it's easy to follow the textbook and at the end of the day, that's what's gonna be tested for their entrance exams, (uh huh) you know and it's part of, / that's collection of issues which force some teaching and methodologies, and then you have got others who use my presence or ALTs' presence to completely diverge from that track and take on more of a cultural expertise we can just, talk more about cultural stuff // which is more for their information, not really, they are exposed to language but not really learning language, I'm not teaching them English, not expose them to English but cultural stuff and then you've got ahh teachers who are willing to run with the role, do some role you know let me introduce activities or ideas that are relevant to the grammar but can be about anything.

(Third ALT Pair Discussion, p. 3)

68 **Takahashi**: Oh you? You will be in charge of third grades next? (あー自分が? 3年生、次?)

69 **Aitani**: Well, first grade. (え、1年部です。)

70 **T**: Oh first grade? Oh next. (I was told to be in charge of first graders) Oh already (5) When is the official announcement? (あー1年部? あ、次。(次1年部と言われ) あ、もう (5) 校内人事は正式な発表は。)

71 **A**: The official announcement is 21st. (正式な発表は21。)

72 T : Oh that's early! It's 26th at my school! It's better to be announced early. (あ、早い！うち 26 だよ！早い方がいいい。)

73 A: Initially, they were saying that, then many people had complained (that's good) and it was decided that the teachers for 1st graders will be announced after the inner announcement (for preparation, I see you will be in charge of 1st graders then) Yes. Yeah, we have to start ordering calculators and stuff; otherwise, it will be too late. (最初そう言ってたんですけど、ほうほうからぶーぶー言われて (それいい) で、19 にあの、新一年部 (内示) 内示の後に 1 年部だけは、発表 (準備あるから？でも 1 年部なんだ) そうなんです。うん、何か電卓やら何やら早めに注文しておかないと間に合わなくなるから。)

74 T : Will there be an orientation? (オリエンテーションもあるの?)

75 A: Yes, there is one on the 28th. (オリエンテーション、はい。28。)

76 T: Those in charge of 1st graders are quite busy at first eh? Things can get quite chaotic. I see. (1 年生最初大変だもんなああ、どたばたとたばとたばたと。そっかあ。)

77 A: Yeah so in that sense, I feel that I had a meaningful exploration now, yeah. (4) What about you, Takahashi sensei? You have been always, I mean, you have been always // since you had the turning-point of your career. (だからそういう意味では良い探検ができたなど。思っています。(4) うん、でも高橋先生はずっとその前から、その、、転機が訪れた時から。)

78 T: Turning-point, (school name) yeah, I became enthusiastic and yeah also I feel like I am rather focusing on the students, work related to homerooms and stuff. [Almost 100% of the time, my work focuses on students' lives rather than their English. So, I am glad to have had this opportunity and realize: "Oh yeah, I am an English teacher. That's right!"] (転機、(学校名) ね。で、夢中になって、[でも立場的にも、英語の教師って言う感じよりも、うん、やっぱり学年のこと、とかの方が普段、ほぼ 100% なので、だから、まあこういう機会があつてよかったかなあつて、ははは、あ！イングリッシュティーチャーだ！って (笑)。)

(Third JTE Pair Discussion, p. 11)