

On May 24, 2012, the 4th Japanese Language Education Symposium titled “Connecting Through the JET Program: Developing Grassroots Exchange Between Schools in the Pacific Northwest and Schools in Japan” was held at Consul General’s Official Residence. The purpose of the symposium was to provide an open forum for Japanese language educators and new JET Program participants to meet and discuss how to pursue international exchange programs between schools in Japan and the Pacific Northwest. Japanese language teachers, JET Program participants, JET Program Alumni, and representatives from the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the Seattle School District attended the event and exchanged ideas. During the Q&A Session, the new JET Program Participants asked many questions and at the reception which was held after the symposium, guests including Japanese language teachers and new JET Program participants had an active discussion and shared information on how to strengthen Japan-related exchange programs.



Symposium Overview

1. Mr. Ryo Kato (Current JET Program Participant, CIR*¹)

Mr. Kato is working as a CIR on the JET Program and has initiated a pen pal program with schools in Japan where he is teaching English and schools in Shoreline School District, where he grew up in order to “make English as interesting as possible” for students in Japan. Other JET Program participants

joined in this project and this initial idea was further expanded through “Video Letters” which were even more successful and interesting to students in both countries and were the most logical solution to meet the challenges of limited internet access and time zone differences between the countries.

It is important for JET Program participants who are departing from Seattle to have good communication with Japanese language teachers in the Pacific Northwest.

2. Mr. Mitsuhiro Tanabe (J-LEAP*² Program Participant, Teaching Assistant of Japanese Language at Roosevelt High School)

The purpose of the J-LEAP Program is to strengthen Japanese language programs in the U.S. and to support local Japanese education by nurturing qualified teachers of Japanese language.

By having a J-LEAP Program teacher in the classroom, students have the opportunity to expand current information about Japanese language and culture. As Japanese language classes are taught entirely in Japanese, it increases more opportunity for students to use Japanese in classrooms.

3. Ms. Yayoi Brown (Japanese Language Teacher at University Prep, Former WATJ President)

Ms. Brown explained about short term exchange program where students visit sister schools in Japan. By visiting Japan, students who are studying Japanese can apply their Japanese language skills in a real life setting and experience Japanese culture first hand. It promotes students’ interest to continue studying Japanese after they return from Japan.

To start a short term exchange program, you need to put a lot of effort in building a strong relationship with a counterpart in Japan and have good communication with schools in Japan.



4. Ms. Kim Roberts (Japanese Language Teacher at Juanita High School)

Ms. Roberts introduced the interactive website by the Japan Forum called “Tsunaga-ru” and explained about how Japanese teachers can start a long distance exchange program with students in Japan even if finances and resources do not allow students to travel to Japan.

Ms. Roberts uses the free website, “Tsunaga-ru” in her classroom and her students have an interactive international exchange with Japan. “Tsunaga-ru” is a secure website where all essays are screened and personal information or inappropriate contents are removed by the Japan Forum. Students must get parent’s permission to participate. Students can share essays online and exchange information with students in Japan and it encourages feedback and peer correction practice.

5. Panel Discussion & Q&A Session Summary

Moderator: Mr. Masahi Kato (Senior Lecturer/Associate Director, Technical Japanese Program, University of Washington)

Panelists: Mr. Ryo Kato, Mr. Mitsuhiro Tanabe, Ms. Yayoi Brown, Ms. Kim Roberts, Ms. Taeko Tashibu (Japanese Language Teacher at Roosevelt High School)

Mr. Kato opened the panel by presenting the following facts about English

language education in Japan. English language education became mandatory in elementary schools in Japan from 2011. The objectives are to develop English communication skills and emphasize global communication. By having international exchange between schools in Japan and the U.S. it motivates Japanese students to study English. Mr. Kato suggested the following three goals for new JETs and WATJ members to work together to create class activities. They are exchange programs must be reasonable, sustainable and enjoyable.

Q&A Session Overview

Question from a New JET Program Participant to Mr. Ryo Kato: How do you organize and create various exchange activities? Is this something only CIRs can do or can ALTs^{*3} participate as well?

Answer from Mr. Ryo Kato: Whether you are a CIR or an ALT, each JET Program participant will be in a different location and it depends on where you are located. In a rural setting, there may be more flexibility in the types of activities you can carry out. The Association of JETs (AJET) and prefectural JET Program groups are great resources when you start a new exchange project.

Answer from Ms. Taeko Tashibu: New JETs should contact their former Japanese teachers before they start an exchange program. Japanese language teachers should keep themselves open and available to helping former students who are on the JET Program if they want to create an exchange program and keep in touch with them and offer assistance.

Answer from Mr. Masahi Kato: There should be a centralized system for Japanese language educators, JET Program participants, and community members to share ideas and information on how to create exchange programs between schools in Japan and the Pacific Northwest.

*1 CIR: Coordinator for International Relations. One of the positions on the JET Program where they are engaged in international exchange activities at local government offices in Japan.

*2 J-LEAP Program: Japanese Language Education Assistants Program. This program is administered by the Japan Foundation and it brings Japanese Language Teaching Assistants to the United States to teach for two years at high schools.

*3 ALT: Assistant Language Teacher. One of the positions on the JET Program where participants teach English as Assistant Language Teachers at primary, junior high and high schools.

