

## Running a Successful ETJ Group: ETJ-Aichi

This article has been co-written by the teacher volunteers who help run English Teachers of Japan, Aichi group (ETJ-Aichi). In each section, individual officers describe their particular duties. By seeing the pieces laid out in this way, readers can hopefully put together a picture of what might be involved in developing a local young-learner EFL group and what the benefits of getting involved could be. Indirectly evident here as well is the high level of communication that is necessary between the officers of this sort of volunteer organisation. From the nitty-gritty of sponsoring successful (i.e. attended!) workshops to the more abstract work of writing a constitution (or articles like this), much of the behind-the-scenes work of running ETJ-Aichi depends greatly on the friendly, devoted and professional inter-communication that takes place between officers online and in person.

### Co-ordinator

*(Joshua Myerson; newleaf@japan.email.ne.jp)*

ETJ-Aichi is an EFL group in the Chubu region for teachers of young learners: students ranging from pre-kindergarten to junior high school. We hold bimonthly workshops for teachers who are interested in learning and sharing new and effective classroom ideas and activities.

Since April 2001, when it was first set up, I have served as the co-ordinator for ETJ-Aichi and have found working with the other officers, and having the opportunity to meet and talk with so many other teachers who attend our workshops, very stimulating.

Our workshops are put on by a great bunch of hardworking officers, six in all, who to my mind have been drawn together out of an interest in wanting to effect change not only in their classrooms, but in the way English is taught. Two things all of the officers have in common are that we find teaching fulfilling and that we are interested in and enjoy being a part of something bigger than our daily teaching positions allow. Every one of us likes to teach and to share ideas.

Although my title is co-ordinator, my responsibilities have been quite varied. Since the beginning of my term I have helped out wherever necessary and have been involved in various aspects of decision making—from developing a constitution for our group to selecting topics for our workshops. I have helped find presenters for our workshops and have done presentations myself. In the beginning one of my main responsibilities for ETJ-Aichi was securing the venue for our workshops, a seemingly simple process but one complicated by the fact that suitable meeting spaces available on a long-term basis are in short supply and high demand. I am also in charge of in-house communications and of running the officers' meetings.

The co-ordinator's position in ETJ-Aichi is a very visi-

ble one. Communications, which include e-mail messages to workshop attendees and announcements at our workshops, are written and presented by the co-ordinator. Officers' meetings, which are held after every workshop, are limited to one hour. I submit an agenda for these meetings, based on the ETJ-Aichi e-mail discussions.

My main goal is to ensure that the group maintains its "prime directive," which is to expose teachers of young learners to new, effective ideas and activities that will benefit and be of interest to them. This is achieved in part by having the attendees fill out an evaluation form after the workshops and by always listening out for the interests that our attendees have.

As any responsible member of a group I do what is asked of me but in addition I often ask other people to do things as well. In fact, my job is to make sure that things get done and that everything goes smoothly. This is the easiest part of my job because the individual officers do their jobs extremely well and because we work well as a team. Everyone is very supportive of each other and willing to lend a hand.

### Publicity Director and Speaker Liaison

*(Sharon Abe; sharon-a@m3.cty-net.ne.jp)*

I have two separate jobs within ETJ-Aichi, besides helping out at the workshops and joining online discussions with the other officers.

My main role in publicity is getting our workshops and group publicized. I construct print and electronic ads to be placed in newspapers, local magazines, on various websites, the ETJ e-mail lists, and sent to David English House, which sends out postcards to ETJ members in Aichi. I keep a record of all ads published.

I use a system based on when the ads need to be submitted, and follow the same chart for each workshop. Keeping to the system is the most important element in getting your ads out. Actually doing the sending does not take very much time now that I have standard forms, perhaps about one hour in total. All of our advertisements are free, and are submitted by e-mail. That means I can do my work in the middle of the night, and not worry about delays in the mail service.

As Speaker Liaison, it is my job to help look for speakers from among our members and to seek out possible speakers from other sources. We ask for volunteers at each workshop, but I also contact those who seem interested or whom we feel would make good and interesting speakers. Once a speaker has agreed to participate, I work out other details with them, such as the theme and supplies or equipment needed at the workshop. The hardest part is finding speakers, but the other tasks do not take so much time.

### Treasurer

(Rae Yates; [raeyates@hotmail.com](mailto:raeyates@hotmail.com))

Being a treasurer is actually easy... when everything balances.

At ETJ-Aichi, the treasurer:

- deposits money and keeps the bankbook, account book and receipts
- makes sure the coin float and cash on hand are available for meetings
- reimburses speakers for travel fees
- reimburses committee members for incidental purchases
- issues receipts for meeting fees
- makes change at the door (for workshop fees)
- keeps track of the number of participants
- makes all entries in the cash journal, deposits the money... and makes sure that everything balances, ready to start all over again.

Aside from a report to the committee after the meetings (and on the website) that does it.

However, the treasurer deals with one more thing: other people's ideas and concerns about money. Money raises issues with people that they aren't aware of... and so it concerns, irritates, worries and unnerves some people. The best thing is to keep the information simple and transparent. As treasurer, your checks and balances are important, and the more information you give the other people involved in the group, the easier life will be for all.

### Secretary

(Peter Warner; [warnerph@naa.att.ne.jp](mailto:warnerph@naa.att.ne.jp))

Basically, the secretary handles the paperwork side of things to support the efforts of the other officers. Each workshop requires handouts, forms, and surveys. I produce these and collect them after the workshop, send the data on new members to ETJ-national and ETJ-Aichi to be added to the database, and post a report on the results of the workshop survey on the private bulletin board online.

For the committee meetings, I supply a printed copy of the agenda (posted beforehand by the co-ordinator), take notes of the discussions, and post a meeting report shortly after. However, most of our management discussion is done online. Having daily access to the internet is a must, as well as having word/graphics software and a printer. Additionally, all of these materials and reports are filed in electronic and paper form.

The main drawback to being an ETJ officer is the time involved. One Sunday every two months is devoted to holding a workshop, and I spend over ten hours on forms and reports each workshop cycle. However, it's exciting to be part of a growing network. The only restraint on our development has been the limits of our own creativity and investment. Personally, being part of a local branch of ETJ has had a profound impact on my classroom teaching. The insights and connections that have developed have deepened my understanding and appreciation of the learning process tremendously.



*ETJ-Aichi members enjoying a meeting.*

### Japanese Liaison

(Kenji Watanabe; [kenkomakijp@hotmail.com](mailto:kenkomakijp@hotmail.com))

I am the only Japanese officer in ETJ-Aichi. In addition to being involved in the general decision-making process along with the other officers, my work focuses primarily on matters specific to Japan. For instance, I translate our public relations announcements into Japanese and see that they are posted and published. I also offer the other officers information regarding practices distinctive to Japan, such as the use of the *hanko* (seal) and the banking system.

We receive a number of inquiries in Japanese over the phone, by e-mail and in person. I answer any questions concerning our organization and workshops in Japanese. Typical questions focus on how would-be members can join ETJ and who is eligible to participate in our workshops. I explain to them in Japanese how ETJ and our workshops can benefit them as well.

I also make efforts to recruit participants and presenters for our workshops through my personal network.

In this manner, taking advantage of my first language, I deal with anything relating to Japan as well as carrying out regular tasks as a board member at ETJ-Aichi.

### Systems Administrator

(Nicolas Cueto; [nrkweto@hotmail.com](mailto:nrkweto@hotmail.com))

In short, if it's computer related, I handle it! On the one hand, I try to make web-space and computers in general as inviting and useful as possible to members and officers alike. A big part of that is the ETJ-Aichi website. As a forum for members' voices or even their contributed materials, the website takes up most of my time, and requires that, for example, I help interested members and workshop presenters convert their notes and materials into web-form, or do some behind-the-scenes tinkering with the server-computer to enable an interactive bulletin-board.

Then there are the other main routines of the job. The more

obvious job-based ones are the workshop-related e-mailings sent out regularly to the general membership, and the creation/updating of the member-info database, which officers use for everything from contacting potential presenters to restoring items lost during a workshop! Less obvious tasks, too, crop up now and then—such as teaching a member how to do e-mail-attachments or even how to find and subscribe (and then configure the computer!) to a new internet provider. Anyway, the best way readers interested in setting up their own ETJ group can probably go about learning the what's and why's behind a web-related officer position is to first have a thorough look at the ETJ-Aichi website and then send me an e-mail—which would in turn add “advisor to potential SysAdmins and Web-masters” to my ever-growing duty roster.

## Conclusion

ETJ-Aichi has been so successful for a number of reasons. Our success is due not only to our officers' hard work and creative ideas, but to a large degree is a result of the energy and ideas of our speakers. Our success is also due in part to the fact that there is a large number of teachers in the Tokai area who are interested in improving their teaching methods, and who continue to take an interest in what we are offering.

The situation described here is, of course, just one way of going about things. Your own group need not, for example,

have as many officers as ETJ-Aichi does nor delineate so clearly each officer's responsibilities. In fact, we ETJ-Aichi officers do don each other's hats when the need arises. And then, last but not least, there are our 1-day only officers, those workshop attendees who volunteer to come in a little bit earlier or stay a little bit later to help us set-up and clean-up, or to staff the sign-in desk, or to lend a helping hand wherever it's needed—in general, teachers who are interested in being part of things in a smaller capacity. So, whether as an officer or as a temporary volunteer or simply as an attendee, be sure to support the efforts of your ETJ group by taking part in whatever workshops happen to be planned in your local area.

*Readers with questions are welcome to contact any of the writers through either their individual e-mail addresses or the ETJ-Aichi website at <http://etjaichi.kweto.com>. We will happily provide more details or answer questions on anything and everything.*

*ETJ-Aichi is always interested in being contacted by readers who would like to give a workshop to our group in Nagoya. If you are interested in making a presentation please contact us at the above website, or contact any of the officers directly via their e-mail addresses.*