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### The Language Connection

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## 'Planet' of team-teaching tips for ALTs

Yoko Mizui Daily Yomiuri Staff Writer

Team Taught Pizza, a kind of English-teaching bible for participants in the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme, has been completely revised as Planet Eigo.

The book was released on a limited basis last month and will soon be sold via the Internet.

Just as Team Taught Pizza was the fruit of efforts by volunteers, Planet Eigo was also created by a volunteer team of foreign JET Programme participants and some Japanese native checkers. Although the production team was formed in May 2006, it took over a year and a half to complete the book as members worked on it in their spare time. Philip Standlee, editor in chief, who worked as an assistant language teacher (ALT) in Gifu Prefecture for three years, returned to the United States during the period of the book's production.

Standlee told The Daily Yomiuri by e-mail that Team Taught Pizza was rewritten in a user-friendly manner with a completely renovated overall design and a new index that makes activities easier to find.

More than 20 years have passed since the JET Programme was launched, during which time, the number of participants expanded from 848 in 1987 to over 5,000 in 2007. Classes team-taught by a foreign ALT and a Japanese teacher of English (JTE) have become common in public schools throughout the country.

Over the past 20 years, ALTs and JTEs have tried to find the most effective ways to teach English together. There are several books on team teaching available, but most of them were too simple or too difficult. It has been hard to find an appropriate, practical textbook.

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The National Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching (AJET), an organization representing JET Programme participants, has published a number of teaching guides. The most popular has been Team Taught Pizza, a bilingual teaching handbook containing various lesson ideas and activities that was first published in 1994 and revised through seven editions. AJET decided to fully revamp the book as Planet Eigo, aiming to make it more practical and easier to use.

The new book includes full Japanese translations for the activities and major content so that JTEs can utilize it as easily as ALTs do. James Lazo, who works at the Institute of Advanced Media Arts and Sciences/International Academy of Media Arts and Sciences (IAMAS) in Ogaki, Gifu Prefecture, is the book's translation editor. Lazo, who passed Level 1 of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test in 2004, translated the English text into Japanese.

Lazo said he was careful about standardizing word usage. "I made a vocabulary list of key words, consulting with native reviewers so that there weren't a lot of different words being used to describe the same thing," he said. "I made sure certain words are translated in a certain way. For us, it's really important to have a book that reflects the efforts that we put into it."

About 30 volunteers were involved in the book project, according to Lazo. "The volunteers in general are current or former JET participants. We were lucky enough to have nine native checkers, mostly JTEs, to review our translations," said Lazo, who headed a team of 10 translators. "As far as the quality as translation goes, most of the translations far exceeded my expectations."

Although the basis of the book was Team Taught Pizza, he said: "It is completely transformed and basically created and re-created by us from scratch. We put a lot of efforts into it, which is a part of the reason why it took an extended time to complete."

Lazo said the editor in chief was especially concerned about quality. "He wanted to make sure this was a good, solid publication," he said.

Standlee, who read Planet Eigo in the United States, said that he was very proud of what the team accomplished. "Planet Eigo's main strength lies in the alternative viewpoints of its authors and contributors, who come from diverse backgrounds and countries. It is a dynamic book and represents [what were] the best ideas of the JET community when we wrote the book," he wrote in his e-mail.

"The next generation of JETs will certainly outgrow Planet Eigo and there will

be a time to rewrite the book again. When that happens, the bar for teaching English in Japan will be raised again," he added.

Lazo is also confident in the book. "I had heard from many ALTs who had used Team Taught Pizza that there were some good activities but [it was] very difficult to navigate. It's not very practical if you're looking for something for a quick idea," he said.

"It [Planet Eigo] is designed to help ALTs and JTEs. It's meant to be literally used by everyone--Japanese, foreigners, those who have little experience or have lots of experience," Lazo said.

Born in Houston in 1980, Lazo became interested in the Japanese language as a high school student. He majored in Japanese at Arizona State University, and he "really got into it." He studied at Kansai Gaidai University in Osaka for 10 months as an exchange student from 2001 to 2002.

After he returned and graduated from the U.S. university, he wanted to come back to Japan and applied to the JET Programme. He was accepted as a coordinator for international relations, one of the program's minority of non-ALT positions, and was stationed at IAMAS in 2004.

"To be honest, I'm a little envious of some of my ALT friends because they get to interact with Japanese students, to be involved in a part of Japanese society. I don't know what it's like," he said.

Lazo, who likes Japan very much and would like to stay beyond the end of his term on JET in July, is now exploring ways to pursue other types of jobs here.

Planet Eigo sells for 3,000 yen and will soon be available for online purchase at [ajet.net](http://ajet.net).

(Mar. 13, 2008)

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