

2021/2022 J-LEAP REPORT

By Airi Imai

Dunsmore Elementary School

Glendale, CA

Konnichiwa! Hello, my name is Airi Imai and I am a Japanese assistant teacher from Tokyo. Currently, I am working with two Lead Teachers (LTs), Arayama sensei and Shiomi sensei at Dunsmore Elementary School. As you know, these past few years have been very tough for everyone because of the pandemic. We, J-LEAP year ten assistant teachers (ATs), were also having a hard time since we wanted to come to the US and experience teaching Japanese here, but our departure had been rescheduled many times. So, I am happy that I could finally come to America. Today, I will share some information about my school and what I do for the classes.



My Host School

Dunsmore Elementary School offers a Japanese language immersion program called Foreign Language Academies of Glendale (FLAG). Students learn all kinds of subjects in both Japanese and English. They learn Japanese through content, not as a separate course of study. In my host school, each grade level has two classes with an English speaking teacher and a Japanese speaking teacher. One class starts with an English class and the other starts with a Japanese class in the morning, and in the middle of the day, they switch the classes so that students can have opportunities to learn both Japanese and English. When they are in a Japanese class, teachers and students have to use only Japanese, and when they are in an English class, they have to use only English. This could be a little difficult for some students because their backgrounds are very diverse. Some students are Japanese children who

are born/raised in the US, some are half or quarter Japanese, some do not have any roots from Japan, some speak Japanese at home, and others do not. This means their level of Japanese ability differs from student to student.

Kindergarten

As I mentioned earlier, I have two LTs, Arayama sensei who teaches kindergarten, and Shiomi sensei who teaches 1st grade. On Monday, Tuesday and Friday, I teach kindergarteners with Arayama sensei. I am going to share my experiences with the kindergarten class now. Since the pandemic, there are a lot of rules that we have to follow to prevent the spread of the virus, such as not sitting on a mat with a bunch of children, but sitting around a table with plastic panels on it to keep distance from other children, not sharing things used in class, but using their own crayons, pencils, scissors or glue sticks. This makes things a little difficult to handle because it is not easy for children to sit around a table for a long time or organize a lot of belongings by themselves. But, seeing it from a different point of view, students have more chances to learn about ownership or how to sit nicely than previous years. Currently, Arayama sensei and I are teaching hiragana, how to count 1 to 10, colors, and weather through Japanese songs. I am very surprised at how quickly the children remember songs and how they love singing. They sing these songs even when they are not in a class and that is adorable. Also, we are focusing on school rules and moralities such as how wonderful it is to share things with others or how to use school equipment rather than moving on to learning other subjects during the same schedule as usual. It is important for children, especially this year, because they did not go to a preschool last year and some children are not used to being in a class with many classmates and do not know how they should act in a classroom yet. We are working on mindfulness by practicing a breathing exercise with a video as well. After a recess, they tend to get very hyper and are not able to sit in a chair, but it is a very good way of helping them calm down in class. Arayama sensei has a variety of interesting ideas for the class and I always learn a lot from her.

1st Grade

On Wednesday and Thursday, I teach 1st graders with Shiomi sensei. In elementary school in the US, children are supposed to line up on the playground in the morning and wait for the teachers to pick them up instead of going to their classroom by themselves. I love this moment when I go to pick up the students, because every time they see me, they shout, “Imai sensei~!!” and wave at me and run towards me. Sometimes they give me cards written in Japanese or little presents that they made for me. That makes me happy and feel like I am bonding with them. It is very important to be in a good relationship with the students so that they can enjoy learning and be comfortable in a class, so I keep trying to build a better relationship with them.



In Shiomi sensei’s class, the students started learning not only basic Japanese such as hiragana but also math, science, social studies, and so on. My main roles in her class are leading science and social studies lessons, reading books to the students, and checking their worksheets. While I lead a lesson, she helps me a lot, so that it goes smoothly when the class gets too wild. I feel it is hard to keep engaging the students in the whole lesson since children cannot concentrate for a long time, and it happens in kindergartener’s class sometimes, but my LTs are good at getting children's attention. They use a bell, rhythmic clapping, or chants well to make them focus on the teacher and when the children hear one of these sounds, the classroom gets quiet quickly. I am amazed at how they are good at managing the classes and I hope I will be able to be a teacher like them soon.

My Goals

I have set 3 goals that I would like to achieve during my J-LEAP dispatch. The first one is, building a good relationship not only with the students but also their parents, other grade teachers, and school staff. The second one is acquiring skills for class management, especially being able to give comprehensive instructions for JFLs (students who learn Japanese as a foreign language). The last one is being a memorable teacher for the students. I am very lucky that I have two wonderful teachers as my LTs because I have a double opportunity to steal tricks for teaching a class. I will be learning a lot more from them and working hard to make our classes more comfortable and much more fun for the next two years.