

2022/2023 J-LEAP REPORT

By Nozomi Ogata

Santa Monica High School

Santa Monica, CA

KONNICHIWA !

My name is Nozomi Ogata from Tokyo. I am working with Nesbitt sensei at Santa Monica High School (SAMOHI) as a Japanese assistant teacher.

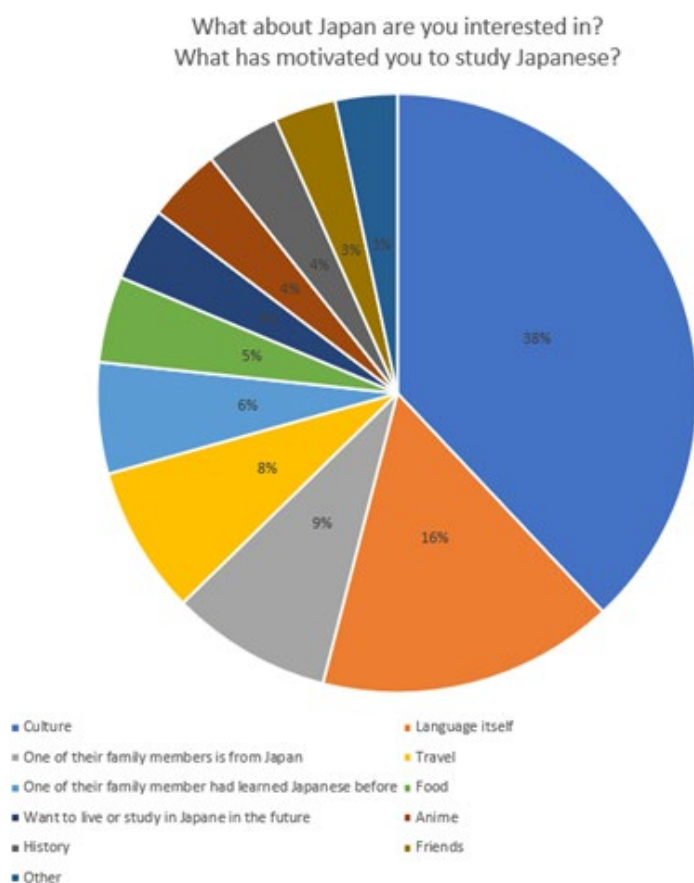
As soon as I completed the Japanese language advanced teaching course in January 2022 in Japan, I applied to the Japanese Language Education Assistant Program (J-LEAP). It is one of the biggest challenges in my life and I feel lucky to have such a great opportunity to teach and learn at the same time. It has been nearly four months since I started working as an assistant teacher and it feels like time has flown by so fast!

Santa Monica High School



SAMOHI is located in Santa Monica, California, which is close to the end of route 66. It is mild to hot year-round, and close to the beach with beautiful sunshine. There are about 2900 students in this school. We have about 190 students taking Japanese classes with 121 students in levels 1 and 2. In addition, another Japanese teacher has Levels 3,4 and 5(AP) classes. Our students of Japanese have diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, so it seems like one small world in the classroom! I was surprised and happy that there are so many diverse students interested in Japanese language at an American high school.

Student Motivations for Studying Japanese.



Students at SAMOHI can choose from several language electives. we have not only Japanese but also Spanish, French, Chinese and Latin. The world language classes are not required subjects like English and math, so I wondered what things motivated students to take Japanese class. At the beginning of the semester, we conducted a short survey about students' needs, readiness, and reasons for studying Japanese. Surprisingly, Anime was not top of the ranking. The most significant motivating factor for students taking Japanese class was "learning culture". "Learning about Japanese language itself" was the second biggest reason that motivated students to learn Japanese.

In the classroom.

1. Self-Introduction in plain Japanese.

I gave my self-introduction to my students at the beginning of the semester for the first time. There were so many students who had never studied Japanese, so it was a challenge



for me to make my introduction plain and comprehensible. For that, I made my slides with many pictures and used a lot of gestures. I talked about what I like (drawing, dancing, and reading manga) and what I do not like (haunted houses and hospitals) in this presentation. Fortunately, after the presentation, some students found they had some things in common with me. They talked to me about their favorite manga and showed me their drawings. This experience still reminds me of my motivation to teach Japanese.

2. Culture lesson

We try to have culture lessons every Friday. We have studied Natsumatsuri, Japanese Fall and the four seasons, Keiro no Hi, Shichi-Go-San, and so on.

I had an opportunity to teach alone when my LT was out of town in October. I taught about the movement of fall colors in Japan, and the best fall color



spots in Japan. At the end of class, I gave students fall colors papers (yellow, orange, red, and brown) for an origami activity. They made fall leaves and put them on the tree picture for each class. At the beginning, I was very nervous, but I felt so accomplished when I saw our students started folding origami with their smiles. We put the fall leaves tree on the wall and suddenly our classroom seemed like the fall season had arrived.

Other fun things.

1. Trick or Treat!

Since Halloween fell on a school day this year, there was a costume contest at SAMOHI. Some of our students came to school wearing costumes. Nesbitt sensei and I also wore Halloween headbands, and we gave candies to students in the classroom. The whole day was a very lively and the sweet scent of candy drifted in the air.



2. Back to School Night.

We had Back to School Night which is briefly an introduction of our classwork to students' parents. I was surprised that teachers had to stay at school until 9:00pm!

Meeting their parents in person, I felt how much they care about their kids, and I felt responsibility as an AT. I introduced myself in English five times, once for each class. It was challenging but at the same time, I was very grateful when the parents told us that Japanese is their kid's most favorite subject. I thought this moment was one of the teacher's motivations.

Conclusion

After four months have passed, there has been a slight change in the relationship between the students and me. At first, it felt like I was not acknowledged as a teacher, but recently many students talk to me and ask me for help. One day, three students called me "Ms. Ogata!" at the same time, it was one of the happiest and hardest moments I have ever experienced in my

class. The teachers at SAMOHI often call their students “My kids”. As time goes by, I realize their feelings now.

I hope to learn many things from my amazing Lead teacher Nesbitt sensei and our students in these two years. I believe that everything I experience on J-LEAP will become one of the biggest assets in my life.