



2026 Special Training Program for Japanese-Language Teachers Report



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The three weeks of Teacher Training at the Urawa Institute were extremely valuable for me. I grew my Japanese linguistic knowledge, learned new ideas about teaching methodology, and made friends both from my American colleagues and from local business owners and patrons around the Kita Urawa area.

First, I'd like to report on the quality of the Urawa Institute Dorm rooms. Mine was spacious and comfortable, making the heat and humidity of Japanese Tsuyu (rainy season) very bearable. It

was great to take a nice, deep bath every night, and even when I wanted to spend time in a Daiyokujou of a Sento public bath, there were various options open to people with tattoos within 30 minutes of Kita Urawa.

Classes were pleasant and informative. We improved our Japanese by discussing in Japanese with each other our schools, our pedagogies, study units and projects.

What I feel was most valuable was the time out in Japanese society, talking with Japanese people in stores, public baths, izakaya, and events. Two specific instances stick out for me.

The first was the Tokyo Flea Market held every weekend at the Ooi Horse Racetrack near Shinagawa. I went one day because I'm a fan of flea markets, but I must admit that I was unimpressed overall by this flea market. I have enjoyed flea markets and asaichi morning markets in rural towns, or the flea market at Toji in Kyoto much more. That said, I had a wonderful educational experience at The Tokyo Ooi Flea Market. I found a vendor who was an artist/fashion designer selling t-shirts he had designed that feature yojijukugo, something I am a fan of, and I noticed one shirt with a yojijukugo that I didn't know. It was written 以和為貴 and he explained to me that it was written by Shotoku Taishi, the famous prince of Asuka era who spread Buddhism through Japan. I love these sorts of experiences where new knowledge comes about so naturally, so I bought the shirt and studied the quote. It is normally read 和を以て貴し

と為す wa wo motte toutoshi to nasu and I would translate it as “The harmony of WA is how we achieve nobility/sacredness.” He wrote it in the 17-treatise constitution, and the basic idea originally comes from Confucian Analects. This gave me a lot of insight into the origins of that hugely important concept of WA harmony in Japanese culture.

Another instance was a day of apprenticeship experience in a blacksmith forge of Sanjo City, Niigata. I have been very interested in Japanese cooking knives and their forging for a few years now and had come across an ad online for a one-day experience in a city-run forge in Sanjo. In the past I was aware of cities like Sakai in Osaka, Seki in Gifu, and Miki in Hyogo, as a famous historical forge cities, but I was unaware of Sanjo and Tsubame in Niigata. So, on a Sunday I took the Shinkansen to Sanjo, went to the forge, and over 5 hours I made a Gyuto kitchen knife from scratch. The blacksmith was very happy that he could teach me in Japanese and didn't have to rely on English as he has done with foreign tourists, and I had an invaluable experience making a knife and learning new vocabulary about the forging process. I even carved into the knife the kanji 除 which is what I use for Jo when I write my name Joshua in Kanji.



The various excursions planned by the Urawa center were all excellent. The trip to first make Washi paper and then learn about Sake production taught me the history of Washi production in Saitama and how it is traditionally made from the fibers of the Mulberry tree, the same tree eaten by silkworms to make silk. Then I learned new knowledge about sake, which is an area I feel already quite knowledgeable about because I love quality Nihonshu. I didn't know before about the special process of parallel fermentation, which is very different from any other alcohol method in the world. Both Koji rice and a mash are fermented at the same time, and then eventually combined to create Sake.

Finally, we went on a “field trip” to Kanazawa and the Noto Peninsula. I was moved beyond words by the quality of this trip, and the Japan Foundation's wisdom in choosing Noto as a place to go and study. First, in Kanazawa, I happened upon a Taiko performance on the side of the street made up of roughly 60 members, and it was the best and most moving Taiko performance I have ever witnessed. I thought it



was even more impressive that Kodo, Japan's most famous Taiko group. Then in Noto, we learned about the devastation of the earthquake, tsunami, and flooding afterward, and the process of rebuilding Noto for the future. Hearing from various members of Noto society, from the head of an organization to a Wakura Onsen local guide down to a humble fisherman, we got diverse perspectives on what needs to be done. One throughline of all their talks was that no one wants to rebuild just to the pre-quake status quo, so what sort of rebuilding needs to happen is complex and needs to be discussed constantly into the future. It reminds me of the saying I learned - Wa wo motte toutoshi to nasu. Harmonizing the diverse perspectives in society is necessary.

I am eternally grateful to the Japan Foundation for this priceless and educational experience.