



2026 Special Training Program for Japanese-Language Teachers Report



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The 2026 Japan Foundation Japanese Language Training Program was an intensively immersive and inspiring professional development experience that I will continue to reflect and grow from. The educators and staff I met through the Japan Foundation, along with my fellow American teachers, were impressive, resourceful, and deeply committed to teaching Japanese language and culture. I feel blessed to have joined their community. The experience and people left a lasting impact on my life.

I first learned about the Japan Foundation Japanese Language Training Program for Japanese Teachers during my school's regional Japanese Speech Competition at the University of Pittsburgh. I could hardly believe that such an incredible professional development opportunity existed, and that it might be available to me.

As an educator, I constantly seek resources that benefit both my students and my own growth. Many workshops and conferences I attend tend to focus on only a few aspects of my responsibilities and are often too general to meet my specific needs. However, this training program was exactly the intensive, focused, and immersive linguistic and cultural experience I had been searching for, to support my development as a Japanese educator.

The program consisted of workshops, seminars, fieldwork, presentations, and both personal and group-based activities, most of which were conducted entirely in Japanese. Our group of American teachers represented a wide range of language proficiency levels, and we supported and encouraged one another through every challenge.

From June to July, our cohort lived at the Japan Foundation Japanese-Language Institute in Urawa, Japan. Located about an hour from Tokyo, the residential setting offered an ideal balance that is close enough to explore daily Japanese life, yet far enough from the distractions of a major city.

The Language Institute provided comfortable dormitory-style housing, excellent cafeteria dining,

beautiful gardens and plenty of spaces to study, relax, and socialize. I was surprised by how quickly friendships formed among the teachers. We discovered shared professional and personal interests that kept conversations lively every day.

Our program sessions covered a wide range of topics and presentation formats that were educational, engaging, and thought-provoking. They sparked many discussions about how we could apply what we learned to our own students' interests and needs. Topics included teacher reflection and methodology, Japanese language, society and culture, project-based learning, lectures and demonstrations, field visits, and intercultural exchange.

In early July, we were able to participate in the Tanabata holiday, by creating traditional decorations. It was a delight to create paper lanterns and cast our wishes onto the branches to decorate the Language Institute.



I genuinely enjoyed every experience in the program and found myself excited to discover the next session. I feel inspired to further enrich my Japanese lessons so my students can feel the same excitement and motivation I experienced and continue to seek deeper cultural understanding.

One of my favorite sessions was the taiko drum demonstration. Taiko has been my favorite Japanese instrument for many years, and I have attended numerous performances and introduced the instrument to many students and friends. The Japan Foundation arranged a special hands-on session for our group. The taiko troupe guided us through the music, culture, and history of taiko. Then for their final workshop, we followed along with one of their performances. It was unforgettable. Some teachers had never held a drumstick before, while others were thrilled to keep up and play alongside a professional taiko ensemble.

Throughout our program, we were encouraged to explore the local neighborhood and take advantage of the convenient public transportation to visit nearby cities and regions. As a group, we traveled to a

variety of destinations that allowed us to experience local culture and cuisine more deeply. Our educational excursions included riding the shinkansen (bullet train), learning about and creating authentic washi paper at a hands-on workshop, touring an exclusively bilingual English–Japanese secondary school, visiting an interactive museum showcasing dynamic seasonal festivals through life-sized displays, and observing regional earthquake and tsunami renovation projects in detail. We also enjoyed picturesque onsen (hot springs), learned about natural salt harvesting, and visited the newly opened Noto Satoyama Pokémon With You Airport.



Each experience—and every conversation with local residents—further enriched our understanding of Japan’s people and landscapes. I especially enjoyed capturing photos and creating authentic notes to share with my students in future Japanese classes.

Throughout the 2026 Japan Foundation Japanese Language Training Program, and even after returning home, I have felt inspired to create opportunities for my students, family, and friends to travel to Japan with me. I want to share my admiration and joy for Japan, its culture, and its people with as many students and loved ones as I can reach.