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A FREE MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER FOR FRIENDS OF JAPAN & TEACHERS OF JAPANESE

### JAPANESE LANGUAGE EDUCATION UPDATE 30: A STELLAR LESSON PLAN FROM A STELLAR TEACHER

*by Amanda Rollins, Japanese Language Program Coordinator*



Tomokazu (Tetsu) Morikawa has been acknowledged to be an excellent Japanese language teacher by numerous organizations. Last March he was awarded the Outstanding Teacher Award by the California Language Teachers' Association (CLTA) and this month he will be awarded the San Francisco Mayor's Teacher of the Year Award.

So why is Morikawa-sensei being showered with awards? It's because of his spectacular lesson plans and the philosophies behind them.

Morikawa-sensei uses his lesson plans as a way to encourage empathy, a bias for action, and self-awareness in his high school students. He does this with Project-Based Learning, a hot topic in the education field which inspires students to learn through projects that have an effect on the real world. But his version of PBL is a little different – He calls it “empathetic Project-Based Learning.”

He described one particular empathetic project to an audience at the California Language Teachers' Association Annual Conference last March. Morikawa-sensei connected his students to a local elderly care facility that takes care of Japanese elders who were born in Japan. Some of the elders are no longer able to travel back to Japan. Some of the elders no longer have a hometown to travel back to – after several decades, some small towns either disappear or are absorbed into larger towns.

Each high school student was matched with one elder in the facility and asked to research the elder's hometown. The students created PowerPoint presentations with simple narration introducing each Japanese town. They featured simple sentences about the weather, the buildings, and the town's products.

By participating in a project that reaches out to real people, the students are invested in their "homework" in a real, meaningful way.



Morikawa-sensei's award are clearly well deserved.

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