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2016 J-LEAP REPORT BY MIKI INOKUCHI

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Konnichiwa! I'm Miki Inokuchi and I am a Japanese language assistant teacher at Shaler Area High school in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I have been teaching with my Lead Teacher (LT), Balsomico-sensei for about 4 months. I am learning through teaching and enjoying my life in America so far. I'm very surprised at how quickly time flies, and that makes me feel like I really have to treasure every single day.

In this report, I will write about four topics including my school, co-teaching, follow up training, and my life in

Pittsburgh.

SHALER AREA HIGH SCHOOL

Shaler Area High School is a public high school in western Pennsylvania just north of Pittsburgh. What comes to your mind when you hear of Pittsburgh? I think many people will imagine an urban city. However, you can see endless forests and wild animals such as rabbits, squirrels and deer around my high school. It is very nice to live here, surrounded by nature, and not so far from downtown.

There are approximately 1,700 students and they can select foreign language classes from French, Latin, Spanish and Japanese. We have 5 levels and 6 classes each day. The number of students who take Japanese classes is as follows;

Level 1: 11 students (most students skip this level because they already took a year of Japanese in middle school), Level 2: 28 students (2 classes), Level 3: 26 students, Level 4: 12 students

AP (Level 5 is Advanced Placement Class): 6 students.

So the total number of student is 83. My students are absolutely amazing. They are respectful, and they seem to have a passion for studying Japanese. Everyone participates in class and I'm glad when my students ask me about Japan after class, which motivates me to work harder.

CO-TEACHING

When I started teaching at my high school, I was surprised because we rarely use textbooks in class, and class activities are always very practical. I remember the class was based on textbooks most of the time when I had studied English in Japan. We are always trying to make lesson plans that have authentic materials so that students can learn Japanese culture. For instance, we wore Yukata, made rice balls, and made plans for a Japan trip in class. Also, Balsomico-sensei and I are trying to teach using Japanese as much as possible. We have a Japanese and English "button" in class. When the button is on Japanese, students can only speak Japanese, which is very effective because students try to speak Japanese so hard. I have many roles in the Japanese classroom, but some of the main roles include teaching hiragana/katakana/kanji, checking student written and oral assignments, teaching pronunciation, demonstrating conversation, and generally supporting students. In addition, I have individual conversation test with students at the end of each unit. Through the past 4 months, I realized that it is hard making lesson plans for 5 different levels. I appreciate that Balsomico-sensei and I do our work together as co-teachers, from planning lessons, to teaching and assessing.

I also attend Japanese National Honor Society's (JNHS) activities. Students who study Japanese can belong to the group. After school, students cook Japanese food, watch Japanese movies, and paint Kanji on the classroom wall, among other things. For example, we cooked Nikujaga (potato and meat) and Japanese pumpkin soup after school. The article about our cooking class was put in a local newspaper, and I'm very proud of it. For homecoming (Shaler has a large event like the culture festivals at Japanese high schools). At the event, we sold sushi, rice-balls, and takoyaki (but we used cheese instead of octopus). I'm very glad when I see my students enjoying Japanese culture and I hope our activities will help increase the number of students who want to learn Japanese at my high school.



FOLLOW UP TRAINING

In November, J-LEAP Year 6 Assistant teachers had follow up training in Boston. We could share our successes and challenges and discuss about them together. It was very meani for me to improve myself as an AT. After the training, I attended the ACTFL (American Co

on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) annual conference. I never imagined that I could attend the biggest conference for language teachers in the US. I learned various teaching methods through sessions from brilliant teachers. I'm trying to put what I learned from this training and conference into practice in class. I appreciate so much that J-LEAP provides such a wonderful opportunity to ATs.

MY LIFE IN PITTSBURGH



Since I had never been to a foreign country by myself and lived there, I was nervous at first, but thanks to my LT and my host family, I could settle down in my new life in Pittsburgh. They always support me in many situations. I really can't thank them enough. I am enjoying a lot of new things in Pittsburgh so far. One of my best memories so far is a trip to Washington D.C. with my host family. Before I started working at school, my host family took me there. I was thinking the whole time that I would like to go there, so I was very glad I could. Also, I'm enjoying American holidays with my host family such as Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. I like how people decorate their houses for these holidays. It is very fabulous! Moreover, I'm enjoying sharing Japanese culture with my host family. For example, we cooked Japanese food, watched Japanese movies and made origami. My host sister is 9 years old and she is very interested in Japan. She always helps me cook Japanese food and she keeps asking me 'How do you say ~ in Japanese?' and she asked Santa Claus for a kendama (Japanese traditional toy) and Totoro (a character from a Japanese movie), which makes me very happy. I'm supposed to share Japanese culture and language, and also to learn about American culture and bring it back to Japan. During my two years here, I hope to be able to share Japanese culture and language with people in this area as much as I can. I would like to go to classes at local libraries, the elementary and middle school in Shaler Area School district to teach about Japan. I hope more people in this area will come to like Japan and will be interested in visiting Japan.

Lastly, I appreciate that I was given the opportunity to teach Japanese in Pittsburgh. Thank you so much to all of people who are involved with J-LEAP including the Japan Foundation and the Laurasian Institute for giving me such a great opportunity. I would also like to say thank you to Balsomico-sensei, and my host family for supporting me every day, and my wonderful students, year 6 ATs, and my friends here.

Arigatougozaimasu!

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