

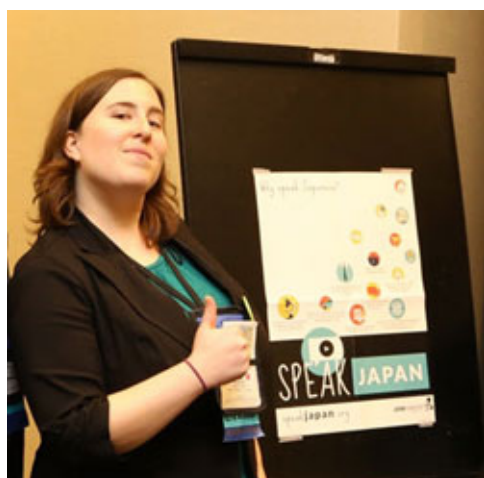
APRIL, 2017: BREEZE ISSUE #114

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

JAPANESE LANGUAGE EDUCATION UPDATE 41: STUDENT-CENTERED ADVOCACY

by Amanda Rollins, Japanese Language Program Coordinator

Why Do I Advocate for Japanese? (Hint: I Don't Advocate for Japanese.)



It's my job to support people who study or teach Japanese language. One day, my great uncle said to me, "Don't you realize that the Japanese government is using you?"

It took me a while to come up with my honest answer: "Actually, you could say that I'm using the Japanese government."

Because world language learning encourages you to talk to and think about other people, it has the greatest potential to foster empathy than any other school subject. And sometimes we Americans need a big dose of empathy.

Looking back on my childhood, I fostered my own empathy by consuming foreign stories, learning foreign languages, and meeting foreign people, and now it's my mission to give those opportunities to new generations of young people. The Japanese government is paying me to do that!

Unfortunately, I see some hesitation from Japanese language teachers when it comes to sharing the benefits of studying the Japanese language. They might be under the mistaken impression that advocacy is "promoting Japan." I want to see a shift in that mindset.

You are not promoting Japan. You are sharing your students' voices. You are standing up for your students' rights. You are opening your students' minds to new ideas and experiences. As an American, I thank you for that.

If you still feel uncomfortable about “promoting Japan,” then feel free to have honest discussions with your students about Japan’s social issues. In fact, according to nationally-renowned teacher Yo Azama, analyzing Japan’s social issues can be a safe, indirect way for your students to start considering America’s own social issues and forming their own opinions.

Your students should have the opportunity to study an interesting and challenging language, and to talk to people from another country. Let yourself fight for that right for your students!

How Do I Advocate for My Students?

Give your students opportunities to speak for themselves, and make sure that your community is listening:

Find ways for students to express themselves through Japanese language and culture: Hold contests for manga-style drawing, calligraphy, acting, music, or anything that facilitates self-expression. Share the results!

Teach your students to track their own progress in Japanese using e-Portfolios. You can also use such webpages to show off to parents and administrators.

As a class project, let your students make videos and share those videos online (with their permission)

Try events and classroom activities that excite you and your students. Enthusiasm is contagious!

Encourage your administrators to interact with your students: Invite them to events, ask them to observe classes, show them your students’ work. Let them ask your students questions.

Find opportunities for your students to shine: Apply for the [Japanese Honor Society](#), sign your students up for the [National Japanese Exam](#) or the [Japan Bowl](#), or host an event that shows off your students’ singing or artistic talents. When your students accomplish something, share it on social media and email local newspapers.

Let your students teach YOU. Create a classroom activity during which students teach you about an aspect of Japanese culture that they love. Share share share!

When I was in high school, I wanted to learn Japanese and there was nobody to help me share my voice. I wish somebody had been there to advocate for me. So please keep giving your students opportunities to grow!



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