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2013 J-LEAP REPORT BY HIROKO MAEKAWA

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Hello. My name is Hiroko Maekawa, and I am currently working as a teaching assistant at Bloomington High School North in Indiana. There are 62 students learning Japanese as a foreign language dispersed across four levels; 1st, 2nd, 3rd year and AP.

I am involved in all levels, and have a variety of roles in and out of class.

One of my roles as a teaching assistant is to model Japanese speaking. Since my arrival, my co-teacher and I have started a Q&A session at the beginning of each class. For example, I ask questions verbally in Japanese, and the students answer the questions by writing in Japanese. We believe this task will help the students develop listening and writing skills. In addition, we speak Japanese as much as possible so the students will become accustomed to listening Japanese. They learn that even if they don't understand the meaning of every word, they still get the gist of the message. I am also involved in giving directions about how to write characters, giving quizzes and grading papers, checking homework, and other activities in the classroom.

The greatest challenge is having 3rd year and AP students in the same class. We try to parallel teach during this class, but it is still difficult for the students to concentrate on their own studies. When one group is learning via PowerPoint, for example, it can distract the students in the other class sharing the same room. We continue to think of better ways to help students understand and concentrate on their work.

My co-teacher gives students projects at the end of every unit, using the grammar they learned during that unit. I completely agree with this goal, and feel the projects are enjoyable activities for the students.

We also have three student groups including Japan Club, Japanese National Honors Society (JNHS) and Japan Olympiad of Indiana (JOI). For Japan Club activities, students are planning to cook Japanese food, watch Japanese movies/dramas, and celebrate Japanese annual events. For JNHS, they will volunteer at the library and elementary school reading Japanese folk tales through *Kamishibai* and teaching Jap song and culture. JOI is a competition for all high school students in Indiana, which will be held in February, 2014. My role is to help them understand Japanese history and culture in greater depth.

I think the experience I will gain here will be very useful once I return to Japan. I have already found some differences between American and Japanese or Asian education. Asian countries seem to focus more on grammar and pattern practices, while American education seem to focus more on activities and projects using the target language. For example I feel that some aspects of American education are better, but the students need more basic practice before the unit projects and that is what I want to help with most.

I have set three personal goals while participating in J-LEAP. First, I want to help students become better communicators and teach them about Japan through Japanese language. Second, I want to learn more about American education and bring the most effective teaching methods back to Japan. Lastly, I want to experience American life and improve my English, which will help me see the world through the students' eyes.

I think it would be a great joy for American students to be able to successfully communicate with Japanese students and understand each other through the lessons that my co-teacher and I create together.

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