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



2013 J-LEAP REPORT BY ATSUYA YOSHIDA

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Hello. My name is Atsuya Yoshida from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I am a Japanese Language Assistant Teacher working with my lead teacher, Mrs. Valdivia, at Taylor Allderdice High school in Pittsburgh. I am really enjoying life in the United States and experiencing a lot of new things. In this report, I will cover the four topics below including my school, co-teaching, culture and

language, and my life in the United States.

My school

Taylor Allderdice High School (AHS) has approximately 1,300 students with diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Although it is a common thing in the U.S., it reminds me that I am really no longer living in Japan, because this kind of diversity is not common in Japan.

The reasons my students are studying Japanese are varied, but most of them have an interest in Japanese animation (anime) and Japanese pop music (J-pop). I was surprised that some students know more about Japanese pop culture than me. I have heard that Japanese pop culture is very popular all over the world, but I did not expect my students to like it so much. Other students study Japanese because it is so different from English and one student told me she wants to know more about her heritage culture.

This semester, we have 4 classes including Japanese 1, 2 and a combined class for Japanese 3 to 5. In total, approximately 80 students are studying Japanese at AHS. We also have a Japanese culture club that meets after school every Thursday, where students enjoy and promote Japanese culture by participating in different school events such as the multicultural dinner. While participating in the multicultural dinner, one student told me that he is going to take Japanese the next semester. I hope our activities will help increase the number of Japanese language learners at our school.

Co-teaching

My role in the classroom is to co-teach with my lead teacher, Mrs. Valdivia. We believe that it is important to do everything together all the time. This means that we plan lessons, teach and assess students together. After classes we reflect on our lessons, student progress, and discuss how to improve the learning activities and assessments.

Through the past 5 months, I have come to understand the difficulty of planning lessons, which I have learned is not that simple. Planning lessons require teachers to take into account different variables such as proficiency and scaffolding. Additionally, I am learning about proficiency-based instruction. Based on this instruction, teaching grammar is not as important as I used to think. I am also learning important concepts for teaching language such as formative assessment, performance-based assessment, differentiation in learning, and backward design.

I would like to thank Mrs. Valdivia for letting me try different learning activities. As an aspiring language teacher myself, this experience will help me become a better teacher in the future.

Culture and Language

We do a lot of things related to Japanese culture in the classroom. For example, we learned about festivals in Japan.

First, we invited Pittsburgh Taiko, which is a Japanese drumming group, to our class for a taiko workshop. Students from Japanese 1 to 5 participated in the workshop and learned how to play Taiko. Before that, students had only learned about taiko, but Pittsburgh Taiko allowed students to experience it as well and this was a very valuable cultural experience for our students.

Second, we cooked yakisoba (Japanese fried noodles) in the cooking class. Yakisoba is often eaten at festivals in Japan and students had to prepare the dish themselves following a recipe written in Japanese, which they really enjoyed. Mrs. Valdivia and I believe that hands-on experience is also important for learning culture.

I believe that my other role is to introduce Japan and Japanese culture and at this point, I am taking the leadership role in planning cultural lessons, which is done according to yearly events. We recently had a lesson about New Year in Japan and wrote Japanese style New Year's greeting cards.

Additionally, teaching Japanese at AHS has taught me the importance of teaching language and culture at the same time. In the U.S., the national standard for language learning recommends educators to consider a variety of ways to teach languages. This has given me a new perspective on how to teach and I am constantly learning more about it.

My life in the United States

I am experiencing a lot of new things and enjoying not only my work but also life outside of school. This is my first time living in a foreign country, so everything is new for me. One of best things I enjoyed is Thanksgiving dinner with my host family, which was my first American cultural experience. Also, I am enjoying the Christmas season surrounded by very beautiful Christmas decorations at home. I would like to thank my host family, the Roberts family. As a participant of J-LEAP, I am supposed to learn about American culture and bring it back to Japan with me and I want to experience as much as I can during my homestay.

Additionally, I am trying to brush up on my English by attending events for English learners at the public library. I also made some friends with whom I exchange culture and language and hope to communicate with as many people and learn as much as I can before I leave.

I am looking forward to being involved in more school community events next year. One of my goals is to promote more cultural activities in the Pittsburgh area.

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