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2014 J-LEAP REPORT BY KIYOMI TADOKORO

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Hi! I'm Kiyomi Tadokoro. Students call me Tadokoro Sensei. (Not Takorokoro Sensei, which one of my student called me the other day...) I have been working as a Japanese assistant teacher at both El Marino Language School and Culver City Middle School in Culver City, California.

It's hard to believe that nearly three months has passed since I arrived here. The reason why I feel this way might be because of the climate. The weather hasn't changed much during the last three months as California has a warm climate throughout the year. Also, annual rainfall is very low, which means it has been very hot and dry. I feel like it is still summer even though it's already October. But I'm enjoying the nice weather.

I would like to introduce my schools. El Marino Language School is not just a regular public school; it offers both Japanese and Spanish immersion programs. One of the goals of the school is to make all their students bilingual and biliterate. There are 6 grade levels at the school starting at the age of 4 when students start kindergarten to the age of 9 when they enter 5th grade. Most of our students continue learning Japanese / Spanish for another 3 years at Culver City Middle School where I also teach 2 days a week with Takahashi Sensei. In middle school, she teaches an immersion program in Japanese as well as classes in English. Over 150 students are taking Japanese this year and it is very popular.

This year, I mainly help Horiba Sensei teach 3rd graders. In the mornings, students are taught Language Arts and math in Japanese and in the afternoon, they learn Language Arts in English. We also provide science classes in Japanese too. During Japanese and math lessons, Horiba Sensei and I divide our class into different levels, so we can offer students suitable tasks. Surprisingly, more than half of the students have a Japanese background. Some are native Japanese and others are second generation or half Japanese. As you can imagine, their Japanese abilities have a big gap. So if we carry out the class as one level, then students without a Japanese background would be left far behind of the ones who do.

Therefore, teaching in small groups based on their levels is a very important part of the education at this school. There are also many events like Undoukai (sports festival) and Gakugeikai (school arts festival) that will be held during the school year and I am very excited to join them all.

It is a great honor to have the experience to work at both an elementary and middle school. For me, teaching elementary school students is more challenging as I had been working at middle school in Japan before coming here. Moreover, I found that I tend to help students right away even if they don't ask me for help. It is just because I can anticipate their needs, but I have to be more patient with them. I need to listen to them and ask them what they need help with to develop the student's initiative. Even if they complain, I need to remember to keep being "a teacher"!!

Lastly, I want to thank all the support from the people around me. Especially, I want to thank my LTs and my host family. It must not have been easy to have me around, but they make me feel at ease and comfortable all the time. The proverb, "Time flies" reminds me the importance of each day. I try not to waste any moment during my time in here and will try my best for my students.

Thank you.

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