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2014 J-LEAP REPORT BY HITOMI KAMEYAMA

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Hello. My name is Hitomi Kameyama. I am currently teaching Japanese with my lead teacher Nakamura-sensei at North Central High School in Indianapolis, Indiana. Indianapolis is the capital of Indiana, located in the midwestern part of the United States. It is a beautiful city with rich cultural heritage, and it is also famous for auto

racing.

When I first came to North Central High School, I was overwhelmed with the size of the buildings at school and the number of students, with about 3,400. However, once I entered the Japanese classroom, I felt like I was back in Japan. There are four levels of Japanese classes; 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and AP(Advanced Placement) with a total of 130 students, and in every class, even with first year students, Nakamura-sensei uses Japanese almost all the time. She also encourages students to use Japanese as much as possible. She is a wonderful teacher who is enthusiastic about teaching and I feel very lucky to be able to work with her. As her assistant teacher, I work to help achieve two important goals.

Our first goal is to improve the communication skills of our students by exposing them to opportunities to experience authentic Japanese language. In order to achieve this goal, Nakamura-sensei and I prepare a variety of activities. For example, we often demonstrate Japanese conversation in natural speed in front of the class, using authentic expressions. Students may not necessarily understand everything, but we encourage them to use language strategies and to guess what we are talking about. Some students get a little frustrated at first, but then they start paying more attention and picking up Japanese words. In addition, at the beginning of each class, students have a chance to share their stories using Japanese as much as they can. I think this helps not only to improve their Japanese language skills but to also create a friendly atmosphere where students feel comfortable and enjoy learning Japanese. Also, Nakamura-sensei emphasizes the importance of Japanese manners, such as greetings and bowing. She teaches students to respect their classmates as well as teachers, which I think is very important.

Our second goal is to help students increase their knowledge of Japanese culture in addition to the language. For example, each first year student researches different cultural topics and gives a presentation on their findings. Through this creative research project, they can gain deep understandings of many aspects of Japanese culture. We also have many fun events where students can experience Japanese culture. Luckily, a JOI coordinator Ms. Chiaki Tokiwa is working in Indianapolis and we are able to collaborate. This semester, she kindly visited our school with local Japanese volunteers and presented Japanese culture to both students in Japanese class as well as those who are not taking Japanese. From their wonderful presentations and activities, the students at our school were able to experience different aspects of Japan including tea ceremony and traditional games. A number of students commented that they enjoyed those events very much and that they became more inspired to become fluent in Japanese with the goal of going to Japan someday in the near future.

It has been four months since I came here and I have really enjoyed working with great teachers, students, and people in the community. It is hard to believe that the first semester is almost over, but I think Nakamura-sensei and I have been able to work well together to make the most of this great opportunity with the support from J-LEAP supervisors, staff members, school colleagues, people in the community, and the JOI coordinator Ms. Tokiwa. I would like to show my appreciation to all the people who are involved in this wonderful experience, and I look forward to making stronger connections with students as well as people in the community.

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