Introducing Japan at Local Schools

Dates: Fall 2009 – Spring 2010
Audience: K-12 students (11 schools, 45 classes)

Visiting local schools and introducing Japanese culture has been one of my major projects as a JOI coordinator. I wanted Ohioans to have a lot of chances to experience and understand Japan, and so I made monthly class visits to schools. I prepared a wide variety of presentations and activities for each visit with real Japanese materials such as randoseru, books, yukata, origami, toys, and so on.

Some of the activities I did in the classrooms:
* Japanese greeting * Origami * Kamishibai
* Calligraphy * Furoshiki wrapping
* Presentation on daily life, school life, food, clothing, seasonal festivals...

Comments: I was fortunate enough to be able to visit many classes on a regular basis. That way, I was able to see how much the students learned in my classes. Every time I visited the class, the students tried to use the Japanese words I had taught them previously. They also prepared and asked a lot of questions. The more I visited the class, the more interested the students became. I was glad to find out that their interest on Japan was ever growing.

On one day, a girl approached me in a supermarket while I was doing grocery shopping. She said “Konnichiwa, Ms. Natsu!” She was one of the students I taught during my school visit. This made me so happy because she recognized me and said “Konnichiwa” even outside of the classroom. According to the mother, she had talked about Japan at home many times. I was able to see how much impact the JOI program had on Ohio children. I believe this is very meaningful.

Comments from the participants:
*I believe the JOI is valuable in the education of our children and I hope it will continue next year. (1st grade teacher)*
*I had a lot of fun learning about kimono. I hope I can go to Japan someday. I want to learn Japanese. It sounds fun! (2nd grade student)*
University Campus Activities

Dates: Fall 2009 – Spring 2010
Audience: university students, community people

During the academic year, I organized several activities at The University of Findlay. They include Japanese cooking classes and dormitory activities. In addition, I became involved in monthly events called “Funday Sunday” at Mazza Children’s Art Museum on campus. This is open to the community. I was asked to have one booth on Japan, and so I had planned “fun” activities based on monthly themes. In March, I worked with Japanese high school students who were visiting the University through a short exchange program. I coordinated their Japanese cultural presentations at an elementary school and a nursing home, and helped them prepare for their presentations.

Comments: First of all, I am very thankful to everybody for helping me set up these campus programs. One Japanese family was willing to help me do cooking classes. The classes had not only the Japanese Program students but also students in other programs. I found it great to get acquainted with US students and have fun together over Japanese food.

For dorm activities, some Japanese exchange students helped me, and everyone had an enjoyable time. I believe this was also a good chance for American and Japanese students to get to know each other.

“Funday Sunday” was literally a fun event for me even though it was sometimes difficult to come up with a new activity every month. Some regular visitors looked forward to experiencing Japanese activities with me. I also enjoyed introducing Japan in this event.

<Comments from the supervisor> The first-year JOI program was a big success! Natsue interacted with so many people in a wide variety of setting – a nursing home, K-12 schools, community youth groups, summer education camps, and the University campus. She not only did activities herself but also helped others do presentations about Japan. Some young Japanese people were inspired by Natsue’s work and developed strong interest in cultural exchange.

The JOI program made a big difference to many people including Japanese already.
Coordination of Cultural Exchange Activity

by Japanese Children

Dates: March 31st, 2010
Audience: 2nd grade students at Bluffton Elementary School
Participants: Seventeen Japanese children and eight Japanese mothers

Until a few years ago, a cultural exchange program was being organized annually between American children in Bluffton and Japanese children in Findlay. Bluffton and Findlay schools had different dates for a spring break, and activities were being organized during Bluffton’s spring break. This year, Bluffton University proposed resuming this activity, and I took part in it as a coordinator.

Comments: I still remember clearly how relieved I felt when this event was over. The event had to be rescheduled due to foggy weather. Because of this sudden schedule change, the audience became the 2nd grade students instead of the 3rd grade. Since Japanese children were main presenters, I felt anxious about the way the presentation would go. However when I saw big smile on American and Japanese children’s faces, I thought that this event was well worth the effort. This successful event would not have been possible without everybody’s hard work. I can’t thank all the children and their parents enough!

Comments from the participants:
*The kid had a blast! They talked about it all afternoon. Everyone did a wonderful job. (Bluffton teacher)
*I had a lot of fun! When we made kanji quizzes, many Bluffton children raised their hands and enjoyed them. (4th grade Japanese student)
*It was a good opportunity for my children to give a presentation. I want them to get interested in other cultures like Bluffton children. (Japanese mother)
K-12 Activity: Classroom Visit

Dates: Summer 2010 – Spring 2011
Participants: K-12 Students (a total of 21 Schools)

Details
I started working with k-12 school students in 2009. Basically once a month, I visited the same classroom for a 50-minute lesson on various topics of Japanese culture. During the second year, I made a conscious effort to make my lesson more interactive. Another thing I tried was to reach out to the Ohio population I was not able to work with during the first year. One of the programs was the summer program targeting on migrant families’ children, for which I worked with the Migrant Education Center in Ohio.

Coordinator’s Comments
School visits have been my favorite activities! I could see the impact of the JOI program directly! I mainly worked with the 1st & 2nd grade students. Before I started working with them, I was predicting that what I could do with them would be limited because of their age. I was very wrong about that. It was just amazing how easily and quickly these young students could learn new things when they enjoy the activities. Their interest never runs out. I always planned school visits based on the idea of multiple visits, and this proved to be effective. Each time I went to the school, the students wanted to try the words/expressions I previously taught. They were also very eager to tell me what they had learned about Japan outside of school. I have been happy to take a part in their personal development through JOI. I can say with confidence that Japan became a much familiar country for these students.

Participants’ Comments

▫ (From “My Favorite Miss Natsue Memory” Book) I have no favorite memory. I liked stories, food, origami, words and games! I liked all! It was so fun, and I want to go to Japan. It would be fun! Thank you very much! [4th Grader]
▫ We all had so much fun learning about Japan with you! I can’t believe you’re already leaving. It’s so hard to say “sayonara” to you. I will always remember you. I would always be excited to hear you name. It is always interesting when you come to our classroom! I [2nd Grader]
▫ Thank you so much for coming to talk to us about Japanese language and culture. It was very interesting and, and we learned a lot. What a treat for us to meet someone from Japan and learn first-hand about your country. We appreciate all your efforts!
Japanese Oral Tradition: Rakugo and Katsuben

Dates: September 24th – October 2nd, 2010
Audience: University Students, High School Students, Community People, Japanese School Students

Details
Using my supervisor and my own personal connection with Rakugo and Katsuben performers, we invited three Rakugo and Katsuben performers from Japan and held an event entitled “Japanese Oral Tradition in Ohio and Michigan: Rakugo and Katsuben.” This was supported by the Center for Global Partnership education grant. We collaborated with two high schools in Ohio, The Ohio State University, Western Michigan University, and Japanese School of Toledo, Ohio. The program included performance and workshop.

Outcome and Coordinator's Comments
This event required a lot of work. However, after having seen excited, curious, and happy faces in the audiences, I felt that it was absolutely worthwhile. It was great to introduce Japanese traditions to the communities. The greatest outcome of this activity is that The University of Findlay has decided to continue working with the Rakugo performer on an annual basis. I think this event was just a beginning, and strongly hope this outreach will continue and bring awareness of Japanese oral tradition to many people in Ohio.

Participants' Comments
☆ I liked that I got to know Japanese culture in a new and exciting way. The experience was hands-on and interactive, drawing me in and making me want to learn more.
☆ Katsuben was very interesting. I learned how we could imagine things in our own way just by seeing something. The narration was really good. It was nice to be educated about the history and have fun at the same time.
☆ Rakugo was fun and interactive. It was a great chance for us not only to see his performance but also to experience and try it. The performer was very talented and I’m interested in seeing more of this type of performance.
On Campus Programs: Working with Japanese Youth for Outreach

Date: The Kake Ambassador Program (August 17 - September 7, 2010)
The Eisu Gakkan High School Visit Program (March 18 – 29, 2011)

Audience: Japanese university and high school students

Details

The University of Findlay hosts students from its affiliated schools in Japan every year. These programs not only have an English language learning component but also provide experiential learning opportunities to Japanese students through cultural outreach activities. My responsibility in these programs was to organize outreach programs and help Japanese students with their school presentations. The Kake Ambassador Program brought eight university Program participants and The Eisu Gakkan High School Visit Program brought nine high school students. Both groups made presentations at the nursing home and the elementary schools I had been working at.

Coordinator’s Comments

Until I was asked to take part in these projects, I had been thinking about cultural outreach activities mostly as my own and was not thinking about training other Japanese for cultural outreach activities. I found out that this task would demand a lot more work than doing activities myself. However, this experience meant a lot to me. I witnessed young Japanese students grow though the experience. Some participants even said

~ Letter from a high school student ~

Thank you so much for helping us with our presentations. With your help, we had successful presentations. Every single thing I experienced in Findlay was very important and I got to learn a lot. However the most important thing I learned was “a smile is the best way to communicate.” I learned its importance from you. You always smile when you communicate with others. I learned my smile could make other people happy. Not only me but also the other students learned it, too. When I made the presentations at the nursing home and the elementary school, and when I smiled, my audience smiled back to me. Those moments deeply warmed my heart.

I wanted to meet you much earlier. I am not a very outgoing person and I may have lost lots of chances, but meeting with you changed me a little bit. I feel myself more outgoing now.

I can’t thank you enough for the many things you did for us, and I feel grateful from the bottom of my heart. Thank you so much and looking forward to seeing you again.
that they would like to do Japanese cultural outreach in the future. One of JOI’s goals is to cultivate individuals in both Japan and the U.S. who will take leading roles in grassroots exchange. My term as a JOI coordinator is soon to be over, but I believe these young Japanese people I worked with will continue outreach activities in their own ways. Now, I greatly appreciate and value the opportunity I had.

**Supervisor Comments**

Looking back, the most significant accomplishment of our JOI activities is the network we developed over the last two years. Now, we have a group of individuals we can truly call “partners.” It is our job both in Japan (Natsue) and Ohio (Kawamura) to further nurture these working relationships. We developed several strategies to continue our work. First, we applied for and received a three-year grant to develop an experiential cultural outreach program using our international students for rural Ohio schools. We will do this project with the JOI program as a model. We are also developing a program in Japan, through which a k-12 partner teacher will go to Japan in summer. Third, we plan to make Rakugo a part of our annual activity. The JOI program helped us develop a stronger foundation for experiential cultural outreach activities in Ohio, and we are truly grateful for the generous support provided by the CGP and the Laurasian Institution. As you can see in this report, Natsue’s impact has reached far directly and indirectly. We will continue our work in Japan and the US.