1. Nippon Now

Date: September 2012 – May 2013
Place: University primary school
Participants: K-3

Nippon Now was launched as an after school program for the exploration of Japanese Language and Culture. Classes were held 4 days a week for the first semester and 5 days a week for the second semester. Our students’ Japanese language levels varied, however classes were almost conducted in Japanese language. Lessons were divided into thematic week-long units, for example week of animals, week of family, etc. It helped the students to be aware of what they were going to learn for that week and focus on it. Throughout the year, students everyday learned how to read and write “Hiragana” and how to count numbers from 1 to 100, etc. They also learned different aspects of Japan such as Japanese geography and seasonal festivals.

To grow their creativity and have them feel a sense of achievement, students had a lot of opportunities to do Arts & Crafts.

University Primary School Art Show

Nippon Now was invited to the University Primary School’s annual Art Show which took place at the art museum on campus and was opened to the public. We set up our Nippon Now booth and displayed students’ art works and worksheets.

About a month before the art show, we started the “umbrella project” which students made miniature traditional Japanese umbrellas with patterned origami paper. At first it wasn’t easy for our students to create these umbrellas but after a little patients and a lot of guidance our students were able to create such intricate and beautiful works of Art.
Coordinator comments

It was a big challenge for me to be an instructor for the Nippon Now program because learning these teaching methods and class management were all new to me. Nippon Now was a pilot program, so I was a little worried if any students would show up to the class on the first day. Despite it started as a small class, the number of students gradually increased. Since most of the students had no backgrounds of the Japanese language nor have they traveled to Japan, I set my goal to have them enjoy learning Japanese with no pressure. It was so great that I could see their Japanese was improving day by day and they were getting excited to know more about Japan.

I was fortunate to have a pedagogy coach, volunteer teaching assistants and a co-teaching teacher to support me. They always encouraged me and developed new ideas. Without them, I think this afterschool program wouldn’t be successful. I hope students continue learning to have deeper understanding of Japan.

Parents comments

- My kid started showing more interest in Japanese language
- I love the wonderful crafts. The kids enjoy learning through the games and songs
- The instructor, Yoriko, was energetic and enthusiastic, and clearly committed to sharing Japanese culture.
- Nippon Now program has been a very positive class for my daughter. She loves the class and looks forward to attend it. Yoriko has been doing a wonderful job at teaching at class.
2. School Visit

Date: All year round
Place: Kindergarten, Elementary school, Middle school, High school, community college
Audience: K-12

One of my favorite things to do is visiting other schools and sharing my presentations. Champaign-Urbana is a college town, therefore there are thousands of international residents here. However when I visited schools I found that most of the students had never been around Japanese people nor do they know about the Japanese culture, so that I think school visits are a wonderful way to share our culture with numerous people. I had more opportunities to visit art class and social studies class at elementary schools over the past year. For those elementary school students I made a booklet about Japan which contains greetings in Japanese, Hiragana chart, geography, cherry blossoms, school life in Japan and instructions to make origami. The best part is when I sang the Hiragana song to the students and seeing them try to sing along with me even though they do not know how to pronounce them. They like the sound of the Japanese language and I am so happy to see that.

Coordinator comments
I enjoyed every school visit I did but I had one unforgettable visit in this particular class at the Next Generation School. After I finished my presentation in this class, students suggested to sing the “SAKURA” song that they had just learned. I was so impressed that they sang it to me perfectly. I hope they could remember me and my presentation whenever they hear the “Sakura” song in the future.

Teachers comments
• Thank you for coming into my class room. Your presentation was phenomenal and the kids has a wonderful time and learned so much! I still hear kids commenting and talking about it!
• Thank you for the interesting presentation for our 4th grade students! They are very excited now about learning more about other countries. They really enjoyed seeing the backpack!
• I just want to say thank you so much for coming in and presenting! It was engaging and very interesting, and the students really enjoyed it.
• Thank you so much, Yoriko! The kids loved your presentation.

Students comments
• Thank you for coming and teaching us about Japan. I loved the origami. I can’t wait to learn Japanese. I want to see a real cherry blossom tree when I grow up.
• Thank you for coming to our classroom. I loved when you spoke Japanese. I also love when you taught us to make the origami cup. I learned a lot on Japan.
I participated in several international festivals. I set up Japanese booth and displayed Furoshiki wrapping, Japanese calligraphy or origami. For Japanese calligraphy, I wrote participants name in Katakana with calligraphy brush. They were always very excited to know how their name looked like in Japanese letters.

I also did “Paint on a folding fan” activity which participants paint on blank white folding fan. I conducted this activity during Japanese Manga and culture session in high school. Most of the students came to join this session because they liked Japanese Pop culture, particularly Manga and Anime. I think it was a very good opportunity to promote traditional side of Japanese culture for those participants and they found that besides the Japanese Pop culture, there were actually so many more beautiful culture in Japan.

**Coordinator comments**

We had an international event called “Travel Around the World” on campus on April. It was very first time for me to work with the interns from Japan House which is a teaching facility on campus devoted to traditional Japanese arts. We were promoting origami and Japan House to the participants on that day. Unfortunately, weather was too cold and windy to do hands-on origami activity there, however still many people stopped by our booth and listened to us.

The interns from Japan House are very enthusiastic and they have a lot of knowledge of Japanese culture. I’m looking forward to working with them again to promote Japan to more people.

**Participants comment**

- Furoshiki is the most amazing thing I’ve ever seen in my life.
- Origami is cool!
Rakugo Event

Date: 20 September 2013
Place: Spurlock Museum at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The Rakugo event on 20 September was the biggest I organized in the last two years. Our Center was given the great opportunity by the Consulate General of Japan at Chicago to host a performance by Katsura Sunshine, a traditional Japanese Rakugo story teller.

I was responsible for promoting this event to the community. Besides publicizing event information through radio, newspapers and the web, about a few weeks before the event I started visiting all the public schools in the Urbana-Champaign area to offer my presentation about Rakugo. Fortunately several schools welcomed me to present in their classrooms, and I believe it encouraged more students to come to see the event.

Until the day of the event I was worried that no one if would show up since so few people know about Rakugo. However, it turned out to be very successful.

The auditorium was filled with more than 200 people. They enjoyed Mr. Katsura’s energetic and professional performance a lot. The hilarious stories Mr. Katsura introduced kept them laughing throughout. It definitely drew the audience’s interest to Japanese traditional culture and Japan itself.

I would like to show my appreciation to the people who supported me, especially to my director Dr. Oyler, Ms. Yamada and Mr. Kaneko from Consulate General of Japan at Chicago and Mr. Cudiamat from Spurlock Museum. Without their support I couldn’t have made it. And of course thanks to Mr. Katsura for bringing his show to Urbana-Champaign for us.

The Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Yoriko Hasui

Director’s comment

Ms. Hasui’s presence has made an enormous difference in our outreach efforts for the local community; she has reached out to schools, retirement communities, libraries, and museums to introduce Japanese culture in Illinois. Katsura Sunshine’s extremely successful performance is one great illustration of her efforts. Sunshine used humor to provide a window on Japanese culture and also traditional performing arts to a capacity audience at our cultural museum’s auditorium. Ms. Hasui’s visits to schools to encourage school children to attend, combined with her tireless advertising through the wide network she has created in the community, brought out a broad audience who all thoroughly enjoyed the evening and took away a taste of Japan to whet the appetite.

Audience comment

I loved it! It’s wonderful!
He made me laugh entire way through.
School/Community engagement
Date: All year round
Place: K-12, community college, Library, Retirement Home, Girl Scout troop meeting, U of I campus

This school year I was able to visit much more schools than last year. I focused on visiting less diversity areas such as part of Southern Illinois. Visiting schools to the south required longer drives for me but their warm welcome made me feel good to be there. School visit in Metropolis, also known as the Home of Superman, is a four hour drive from Champaign and is one of my most impressive experiences. Most of the students have heard of Japan but they have never imagined what it is like, so each topic I brought up was something very fresh to them and they were so excited to learn everything about Japan. Their favorite was Japanese greetings with bowing. After they learned “Konnichiwa”, “Arigato” and “Sayonara”, the students in the entire school greet one another in Japanese way when they met in hallway or cafeteria.
From August 2013 to October 2013, I conducted “3 months Japanese immersion cultural program” at a retirement home. The residents really enjoyed kinesthetic and hands-on activities such as Bon dance, Furoshiki and lucky cat making. Also I was invited to a number of international events held in schools and the community. Luckily, I had people who offered me voluntary help therefore all the event went well. The collaboration with individuals from other Asian countries besides Japan, also became wonderful opportunity for people to learn several different culture at once.

Students and teachers comments

• You gave us so much knowledge about Japan! I think it would be cool to visit Japan.

• The students and I would like to thank you for presenting our class. We enjoyed learning about Japan and the art of Origami. We truly appreciate the experience.

• I am so glad you to come to our classroom to teach us about Japanese culture. I think you were an amazing teacher to us and we were able to teach you also about our culture. I enjoyed what you taught us and it inspired me to want to go to Japan. I think it would be fun to go to Japan and to see all the cherry blossom trees.

• Arigato for coming and teaching us so much about Japan. Right when I got home I went straight to my parents to share what I had learned. I hope to go to Japan some time.

• Wow! Japan was very cool! I was amazed that Japan was full of many beautiful sights.

Supervisor’s comment
Yoriko’s visits to schools not only brought the Japanese language and culture to the local schools, but also broadened students’ “cultural horizons.” Yoriko’s work set up an example of bridging the resources in public universities to the K-12 schools and communities. Her presentations at the retirement home are especially well-received which also demonstrated the width and depth of Yoriko’s community engagement. Yoriko’s school visit also enhanced our Center’s relationship with the local schools which has a very positive impact on our outreach work in general.
Facilitating the exchanges of American and Japanese institutions

Date: 26 February 2014 to 25 March 2014
Place: U of I campus

My mission as an outreach coordinator of Japan is not only introducing Japanese culture to the community but also being a liaison between American and Japanese institutions. The International Institute for Carbon-Neutral Energy Research at Mechanical Science and Engineering department hosted five brilliant students from Kyushu University. Our center partnered with Mechanical Science and Engineering department to welcome them and we planned a series of workshops which include documentary film making.

A few days after their arrival, we held orientation activities to help them get familiar with the campus and the city. As part of the orientation activities, we hosted a scavenger hunt. I’m proud that none of them gave up and they completed it within two hours in spite of severe cold weather (below -10°C). On another day I took them on a city tour. We visited the landmarks in the city and major shopping malls. They really enjoyed exploring the local scene and they got extremely excited to shop in the huge grocery store.

The series of documentary film workshop were led by my supervisor Dr. Wang, and I served as her assistant. She and other lecturer taught the students how to make a documentary film including video recording technics and film editing. The project was about the five of them making one documentary film about their life here. At the beginning they looked overwhelmed by it, but because of my supervisor’s great support, finally they were able to motivate themselves to record and photograph each moment they felt was important for them to remember. When all the footages were nicely combined together, it became an amazing documentary film. I hope they treasure it and share it with their friends and family. (it has also encouraged Kyushu University to expand their exchange relationship with us)

**Supervisor’s comment**

Yoriko played a crucial role in facilitating the visit of the Japanese students, especially for the documentary project. Yoriko first offered orientation program for these students and then designed various cultural activities for them to be better engaged on campus. I can’t imagine how this program is going to turn out without Yoriko’s brilliant work. Everybody on campus who has worked with Yoriko has been very impressed by her warmth, efficiency and creativity. We only wish Yoriko could work with us longer. We all miss her fondly and wish her the best no matter what she does in the future.

**Coordinator’s comment**

It’s been an amazing two years journey here in Urbana-Champaign and I had the opportunity to meet wonderful people who taught me a lot of about their culture. It’s sad that I have to leave but I’m leaving with beautiful experiences.