2026 Special Training Program for Japanese-Language Teachers Report



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This summer, I had the incredible opportunity to participate in the Japan Foundation's Japanese language teacher training program in Urawa. Before arriving, I was filled with excitement, but I was also nervous. Although I have studied Japanese for many years and have been teaching Japanese to middle school students, I often struggled with feelings of self-doubt. I don't have the same connections to Japan as many of my peers and I don't have nearly as much experience in teaching. I constantly questioned whether my Japanese was strong enough or whether I was good enough to even be in my career. Despite my passion for language and culture, I often felt like I was not enough.

One of the greatest gifts of this program was that it helped me see myself differently. From the beginning, I was surrounded by other educators who shared the same passion for teaching and for Japanese culture. For the first time in my teaching career, I felt a true sense of belonging and community. I realized that I was not an outsider trying to prove that I belonged. I was already part of a group who were all working toward the same goal: helping students become lifelong learners.

The classes during the program were one of the most valuable parts of the experience. We were introduced to a variety of Japanese language teaching methodologies and had opportunities to discuss how these approaches could be adapted for our own classrooms. Rather than just learning about activities and strategies, we experienced them ourselves as students. We were able to put ourselves in the role of learners once again and gain a better understanding of how our students think.

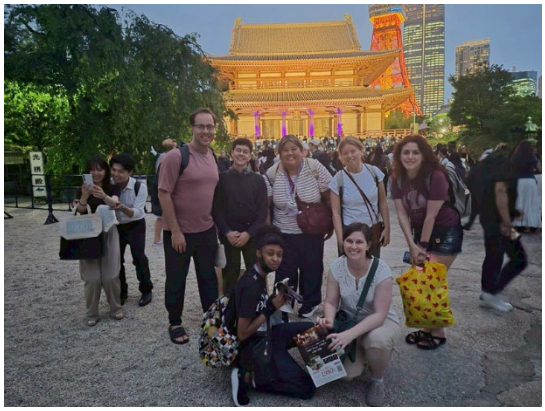


We also gained access to a wide variety of teaching resources created by The Japan Foundation, as well as materials shared by the other teachers in our training group.

The opportunity to exchange lesson ideas, classroom activities, and teaching strategies with other Japanese educators was incredibly meaningful. As Japanese teachers, we are often the only teacher in a school who teaches our subject. It can be a very isolating experience, so having the chance to collaborate with others who understand those unique challenges and joys that come with teaching Japanese was invaluable. I returned home with new resources, new ideas, and a greater appreciation for the importance and value of collaboration.

Another highlight of the program was the opportunity to participate in hands-on cultural experiences. We learned about the history and production process of sake and visited a sake brewery, participated in a furoshiki workshop, and took part in a regional training trip to Kanazawa. Although our time in Kanazawa was unfortunately shortened, the experience still provided valuable opportunities to learn about regional culture, history, and modern issues in Japan. One experience that especially impacted me personally was the ōdaiko demonstration. Watching the performers share their stories through powerful rhythms and movement was an experience that is difficult to fully describe. The music, the energy, and the emotions behind the performance created a connection to Japanese culture that I had never experienced before.

The visit to Konosu High School was another unforgettable experience. Being able to tour a real Japanese high school, observe classes, and see the daily lives of Japanese students firsthand gave me a perspective that cannot be gained from textbooks or videos. Meeting and talking with the students and teachers was a valuable experience for everyone involved. It was a true cultural exchange, where we were able to share our own experiences while learning about theirs. I hope to bring these experiences back to my students so that they can develop a more authentic understanding of Japanese schools and daily life.



Perhaps the greatest lesson I learned from this program was the importance of community and networking. Many of my favorite memories from the trip happened because of the relationships I built with the other teachers in my group. Exploring the city, visiting local restaurants, and enjoying karaoke nights were experiences I may never have had on my own. Being surrounded by people who understood my interests, my challenges, and my passion for Japanese language education gave me the confidence to step outside my comfort zone.

More importantly, this community helped me recognize my own value. I returned home with greater confidence not only in my Japanese skills and teaching abilities, but also in who I am as an individual. I

realized that what I bring to my classroom is valuable and that I do not need to compare myself to others in order to belong. Many Japanese language teachers understand the feeling of being alone in their profession. We're often isolated and underfunded, which can make it feel like we must create everything and solve every problem by ourselves. This program reminded me that teaching does not have to be an isolating experience. Even if my fellow Japanese teachers are not in the same school, city, state, or even country, I now know that I have a community of passionate educators who support one another.

I am incredibly grateful for this experience and for the people who made it so meaningful. I returned from Japan with new teaching strategies, cultural experiences to share with my students, and most importantly, a renewed sense of confidence and belonging. I know now that I am not teaching alone. I am part of a larger community of Japanese educators, and together we continue to inspire the next generation of students to connect with Japan.