

Season Language and Cultural Transition Day for Year 6 students

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In 2016, having just returned from a year in Japan as the 2015 WA Education Department's exchange teacher to Hyogo Prefecture, I was nominated to participate in the Department's Language Leader Initiative program. The idea was to develop and lead some form of action research to achieve a set of self-created objectives.

While in Japan, I collected an insane number of seasonal resources and witnessed the Sempai – Kohai system in action. I wanted to use both in my Japanese Language classes back in Australia. It would be an interesting way for students to be in charge of their own learning as well as learning from peers. Students could also learn with authentic resources. Hopefully, this would boost their long term interest in the country and in the learning of the language.

Inspiration for my project came from working with the Hyogo Centre and Japan Foundation, Sydney who brought the Obento Workshop and Japanese Roadshow to our school. In both events, students from schools within a 50km radius came to participate. However, in rural WA regular access to events is not possible for our students as most are held in capital cities. With this in mind, the opportunity presented to create our own event. I decided to develop a Season Language and Cultural Transition Day for Year 6 students coming to our school the following year. The Year 7 language students would be the Sempai; the Year 6 students would be the Kohai. I decided not to make it a Japanese only day, but include the Italian classes and our Indigenous program. Incorporating all languages in the school sends a clear message to our feeder schools, students and the community that languages are an important part of the curriculum at our school.

Year 7 students worked in groups for approximately 8 weeks to research, create and rehearse a 15 minute lesson which included language, or language and culture. Japanese language students could use my resources, create their own, or both. Some worked very hard ensuring everything was prepared in advance. The lesson was based on something related to the seasons and included season based language games, Italian mask making, dot painting, local Indigenous storytelling, using calligraphy to write the season names in *Kanji*, making New Year decorations, seasonal patterns on Kimono, *Tanabata* story and wishes, *Setsubun* story telling, *ehomaki* (good fortune sushi roll) making and bean throwing, New Year kite making, Hanabi and Lantern festival's lantern making, *Hanami* card making, *Tsukimi mochi* tasting, *teru teru bozu* making, *uchiwa* making,

seasonal foods, and so on. In total, 44 lessons were prepared by 120 students for the 130 Year 6 students who attended.

The school gym was transformed for the morning of activities. Nearly all students were engaged throughout the morning. As nearly all Year 7 students were involved, those classes were collapsed and the teachers helped out. They were surprised to see those few students who were sometimes non-compliant, totally engaged in teaching their activity. The morning also gave them a first glimpse at next year's cohort as well. The Year 6 teachers, not knowing what to expect, were amazed at the amount of work that students had put in to prepare the lessons. The Year 6 students were nearly always engaged and students from the various schools started to mingle during the day. The day set a positive tone for language learning at our school leaving students wanting to continue learning a language in high school because it is 'cool'. Now the tone is set, it is up to the language teachers to continue the momentum into the Year 7 classes where this year's kohai will be next year's sempai.

I have ideas for further events such as this and a couple of trips back to Japan in early 2017 will see a large supply of resources collected for the next project. However, none of this would have happened without seeing what could be done through the Japan Foundation's travelling programs and the support and advice they have provided over the last few years. Nor would it have happened without a very supportive principal who believes in the value of language learning and has belief in me as a teacher to bring together such an event.

Editor's note: Tina reported on this project at the 2016 Key Language Leaders Presentations, at the Department of Education WA Statewide Services Centre in December 2016, attended by Ben Trumbull of The Japan Foundation, Sydney.

The Japan Foundation, Sydney offers grants for running workshops, classroom materials grants, and offers Japan realia loans (Japan-in-a-box). Please see our website for details.



Some of Tina's resources in her classroom, including a tatami mat



Various workstations were set up in the gym for students to revolve around.

Contributed by Tina Dawson
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