



The students worked hard at expressing their opinions



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**Guiding Principle:**

I believe foreign language classes are extremely valuable for junior and senior high school students as a means for getting students to think about and gain practice in communication and understanding of different cultures. I hope that, through my Japanese class, students will not only increase their ability to use the language, but will broaden their horizons by encountering the new and unfamiliar, learning more about it, and reflecting on it.

The students I taught this year were eleventh graders who had started studying Japanese from about the fifth grade in elementary school. Their main goal this year was to learn to express their own opinions using the vocabulary and grammar patterns they had acquired. Just as I was searching for a good theme that would not only suit the students' age and interests but provide something they could talk about at their level of Japanese, I came across the perfect teaching material in the *TJF Newsletter*.

We had studied while using Deai what each of the seven Deai students' club activities were and how they related to their clubs. For a summarizing activity we read "Meet Shiro" from *TJF Newsletter* No. 24 and had a discussion about the reasons for joining a club.

By reading about Shiro's experiences my students were able to understand not only the meaning of words like "sempai (先輩)" and "kohai (後輩)" (students of higher grades and lower grades, respectively) but also the culture underlying them. When I asked my students whether they had that sort of hierarchy among students in their own club activities, they said no at first, but after giving it some thought, replied that "there might be something similar here." Similarly, they found the term *kikoku shijo* (帰国子女 returnee children) somewhat unfamiliar, but in the end they seemed to get the concept. Since the students hailed from a variety of backgrounds, they could sympathize with the difficulty of fitting into a new environment.

During the discussion, three out of the four students in the class said that teamwork with friends was the most important thing in club activities, while the fourth said it was winning. At the students' level of Japanese vocabulary and grammar they could only manage short sentences like *boku wa katsu koto ga ichiban taisetsu da to omoimasu* (ぼくは、かつことがいちばんたいせつだとおもいます "I think winning is the most important"), but even that single utterance encompassed and conveyed a variety of thoughts. I had students express, as much as possible in Japanese, their own approach to and thoughts about club activities, allowing them to resort to English for support. They worked hard at expressing their opinions to each other: "You've got to win," "Teamwork is just a façade; everyone's true intent is to win," "No, friends are important, too." In the end, they concluded that "Good teamwork is necessary in order to win."

The story "Meet Shiro," as a controversial topic, helped incite in my students the desire to try their hardest to make their own opinions heard. Their Japanese was halting, but they seemed to feel that they had really conversed. I believe the impatience that resulted from being unable to express sufficiently what they wanted to say was a starting point, and even became a motivation for them to study more in order to be able to express their opinions more clearly.



The Japan Forum Newsletter No.24 Meeting People: Meet Shiro