



The Japan Forum Newsletter

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国際文化フォーラム通信

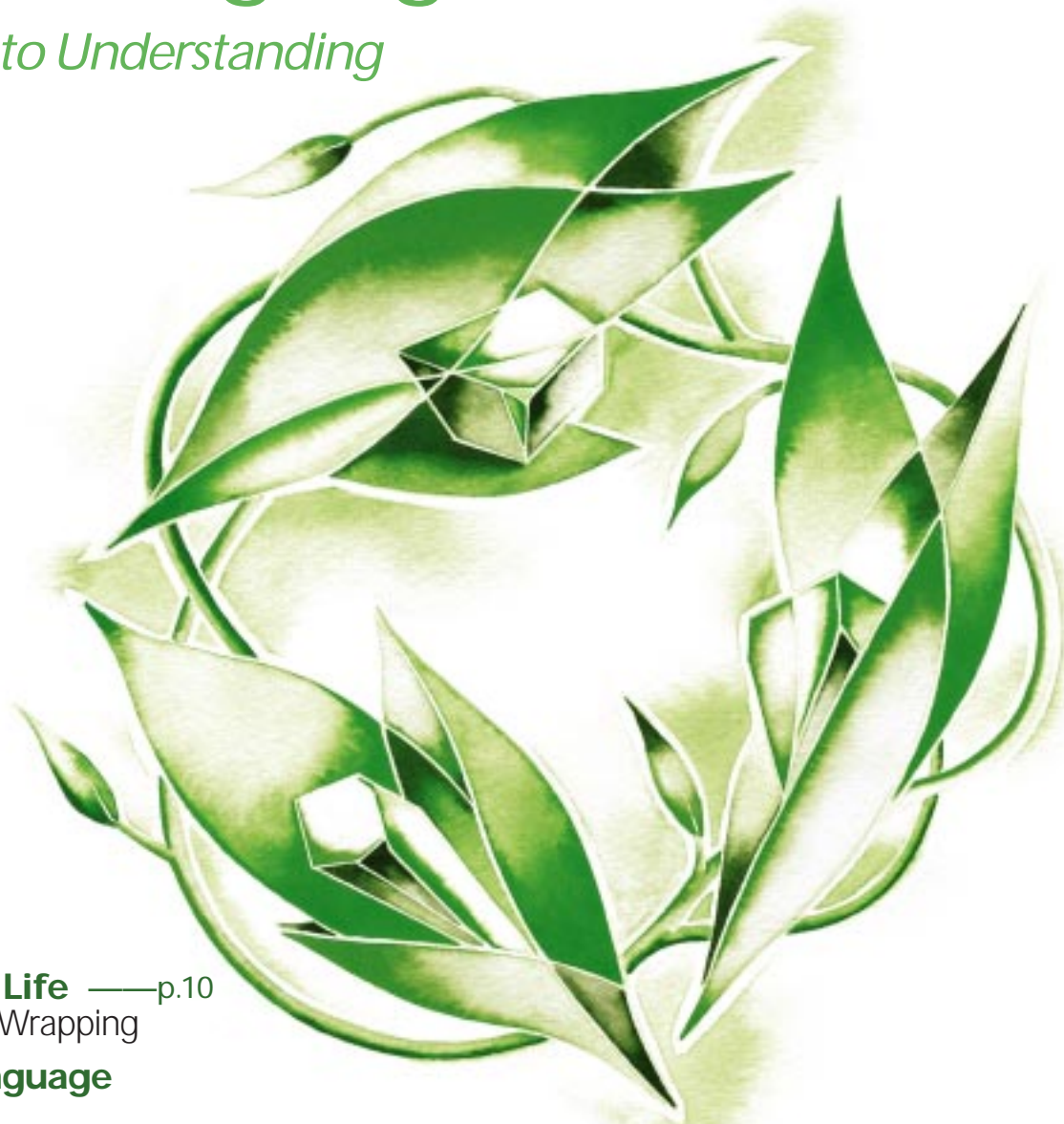
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Announced

Teaching Culture in the Language Classroom

Pathways to Understanding

At the 1997 meeting of the American Council on Teaching of Foreign Languages (Nashville, Tennessee) the Japan Forum held a session on November 22 entitled "How Can Culture Be Taught in the Language Classroom?" At the session, Sandra Lopez-Richter, winner of the grand prize in TJF's first (1995) Lesson Plan Contest: *Ideas and Examples of How to Teach Culture in the Japanese-language Class* (targeted at Japanese-language teachers at elementary and secondary schools in countries other than Japan) and Kanō Yōko, another prize-winner, talked about the reasons they teach culture in Japanese-language classes. Peggy Hagmann, who won a prize in the foreign-language education division of the 1995 American Teacher Awards presented by the Walt Disney Company and McDonald's, discussed the importance of linking cultural understanding to Japanese and other foreign-language education for young students.

This issue of The Japan Forum Newsletter introduces summaries compiled from the presentations in this session and considers the place of Japanese-language education in American schools. The experiences recounted here confirm the importance of cultural understanding in foreign-language education, not only in the United States but everywhere.



Culture Through Food

Sandra Lopez-Richter



Sandra Lopez-Richter

Teaches Japanese and Spanish at Crestwood Middle School, Royal Palm Beach, Florida. Her lesson plan "History of Japanese Rice" won the grand prize at the secondary school level in the 1995 TJF lesson plan contest.

I owe my idea of teaching about Japanese rice to my Mexican roots. I've always loved cooking, and my father owns a couple of Mexican restaurants, so our family was always involved with food, preparation of dishes, and other things to do with eating. I knew how important tortillas and chiles are to Mexican cooking. In Mexico, the different Mexican tribes have special ceremonies in which corn and cornmeal is used, for example, in rituals for the dead. Then again, the Mayan culture has a cuisine very different from that of the Aztecs. When I learned about the role of rice in Japan, I realized that there are many similarities to the role of corn in these cultures.

So I dedicate one entire week to teaching about Japanese rice and related foods. The first thing I have to do is get rid of the misnomers the children have acquired—that Japanese eat "dogs and cats," or "chow-mein"—so that they will begin to see that each Asian culture has its own particular foods and customs. And, rather than talking about how "weird" these foods are, I try to give them the background, show

the rich history of rice, for example, and show the correspondences to the tortilla of Mexico, the bread of France, the pasta of Italy.

In teaching you have to plant the seed of enthusiasm, and for this purpose I think that culture is crucial. It is impossible to separate language from culture. If you do not incorporate culture into language instruction, you may find that students grow fluent to a certain extent and become very knowledgeable, but they don't become really enthusiastic. It is important to develop linguistic proficiency in Japanese, but if you don't have a love of the culture, it's not going to be contagious. In our society today, I think people are finally coming to understand that Japanese is a unique language and Japan has a unique culture. They are realizing that Japan is different and distinct from Thailand and China, and are learning to appreciate it. This can be accomplished through teaching about food and other aspects of culture. While each culture is unique, there are also many universalities and features shared among different cultures.



It is quite a joy, I must say, to go to a sushi restaurant in my community and find children from my classes there, enjoying the food. They go regularly, the sushi maker tells me, and the kids themselves tell me they are going to study Japanese in college. This gives me a real thrill. I have found that the longer I teach, whether it be Spanish or Japanese, the more I realize both the unique qualities of each culture and the similarities among them.

My program begins with telling the children about the different words for rice in Japanese—*kome*, *gohan*, *raisu*—and so on. The seventh graders know how to write “*raisu*” in katakana. I explain how this food is called “*raisu*” when eaten with Western food and “*gohan*” when it comes with Japanese-style food. I tell them about the different types of rice—related ceremonial foods including *sekihan* and *o-mochi* for *O-shōgatsu*. Right before Christmas break I buy frozen *o-mochi* and this year we will grill them on grills that I brought back from Japan. We’ll wrap them in *nori* and dunk them in *shōyu*, and explore some of the other customs that go with *O-shōgatsu*.

I tell them about *shinmai*, about how rice was once used in place of money, and why it is so important to eat every little grain of rice in your bowl. We learn about *onigiri*. I have access to

an Asian food store that sells *umeboshi*—which I love myself—and we make proper *onigiri*.

About two weeks ago we had a lesson on Japanese breakfast. I got fish, *nattō*, *tsukemono*, and made *tamagoyaki* and *misoshiru*, and the kids had quite a time. It was wonderful. And now the children are saying, “Is there a traditional Japanese lunch we can have?” So this year we will have a little *bōnen-kai* in the classroom, learn about the ingredients for *sukiyaki* and try it out. In that connection I think I’ll tell them about the differences between Kansai and Kanto.

There is a great deal you can teach about culture in the Japanese classroom. For example good table manners: they have learned that one does not point with one’s *o-hashii*. You should not suck on your chopsticks, put them in the bowl or stick them upright in your rice. We note the differences between Chinese and Japanese chopsticks. I have also done a lesson on noodles and slurping, telling them how it’s all right to slurp Japanese noodles and the louder you slurp the more you express how good it is, but that they shouldn’t slurp their chicken noodle soup.

I can feel the children developing a fascination in Japanese language through this kind of cultural experience and I know that it will foster

in them a desire to learn more and perhaps to go to Japan. I love teaching. It is priceless to be able to touch the hearts of young children who at one time perhaps viewed Japanese as people with “slanted eyes” or other stereotypes, but who become really interested in this different culture. And I have found that teaching about the culture of food is a very effective approach for drawing out students’ interest and enthusiasm. 🌱



Gohan



Bento



Mochi



Onigiri



Learning Body Language

Kanō Yōko



Kanō Yōko

Former Japanese-language teacher at John T. Hoggard High School, Wilmington, North Carolina. Kanō now teaches Japanese at the University of North Carolina. Her lesson plan "Body Language" won a prize in the 1995 TJF lesson plan contest.

At the very beginning of the school year, first level, on the very first days of class—when enrollment has settled down—I start teaching about Japanese language and behavior in the culture.

I take due advantage of myself as a native speaker, because for many of them I am the only Japanese they have ever come into contact with. Although I have been living in the United States for seven years and have become rather Americanized in many ways, in the classroom I try to be "Japanese," to go back to my roots. For example, instead of pointing to my chest, as Americans do, to indicate myself, I point to my nose, as Japanese do. If I have an assistant teacher who has just come from Japan, I tell the students to notice the typically Japanese character of their hand gestures. For example, when they are embarrassed, their hands go to their mouth. It is an ideal opportunity for students to see how Japanese behave and interact with each other. They can eavesdrop on what we are saying in Japanese. They can see us bowing to each other and saying "Onegaishimasu," and so on.

I encourage the students to be observant, and to exercise insight and understanding about things that may initially strike them as strange or different. Observing others perceptively also helps students think about their own character. They may think it odd to see Japanese bowing into the telephone, but when they think about it, Americans, too, use hand gestures and expressions as if the person on the other end could see them. Behavior may be displayed in different forms, but it plays essentially the same role. Students don't have to start acting like Japanese themselves, but they need to become aware of different gestures used in other cultures and that some gestures mean different things in other cultures.

One aspect of learning Japanese—learning any foreign language—that is particularly valuable is that it is an opportunity to acquire different characteristics. The American friends I came to know as foreign students in Japan, whom I met later here in the United States, behaved quite differently in Japan from the way they do here in their own country. Obviously they adopted some characteristics in Japan as Americans speaking Japanese. I always tell my students that they will acquire something different in the course of studying Japanese. These are young people who are still learning social expectations, rules, and manners. It is a good chance for them to become more aware of what they are doing and how they look.

At the very beginning stage, I introduce bowing and nodding (*aizuchi*) during conversation. I emphasize that nodding means "I see," "I'm listening," not necessarily, "I agree." I explain how, depending on your relationship to the other person, the way you bow or nod will be different. We also talk about smiling and laughter. They sometimes think that Japanese laugh at the strangest times. In Japan, if you step on somebody's foot, you might grin





or laugh in embarrassment and apology, but sometimes it makes American people angry—they declare it's not something to laugh about.

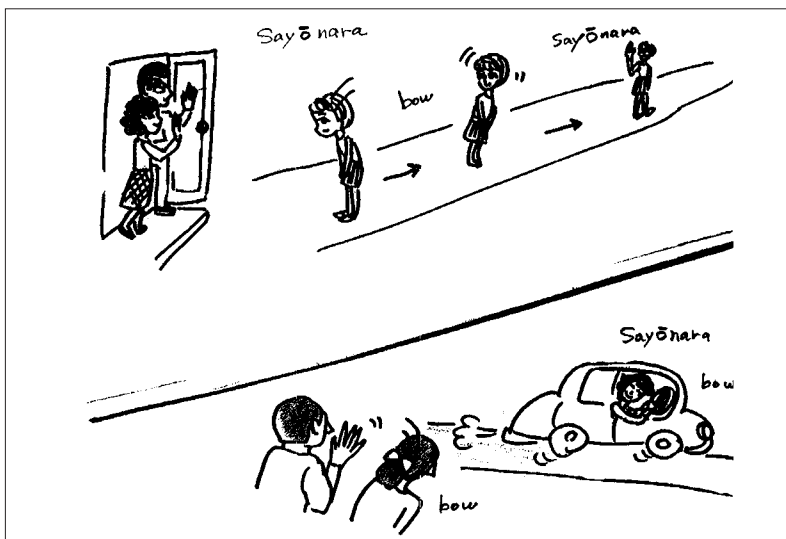
We talk about saying good-bye. Japanese have a tendency to repeat farewells over and over, until they are out of sight. But some Americans do the same. I point out the similarities and they realize that it's not just some kind of strange Japanese behavior. They like to point out how Japanese still try to bow when they are inside a car moving away. I remind them that this is the custom that goes back even before there were any cars.

I do notice the students acquiring new kinds of behavior. When they meet their American teachers in the hallway they greet them American style, but when they see me—especially at the beginning of the semester—they start bowing deeply to me, saying "*Ohayō gozaimasu.*" Little by little they will learn when to use a very deep bow and when a brief dip and wave of the hand is appropriate. That shows them how in Japan, as we move from very distant relations to very casual ones, the way we bow changes.

My second objective in teaching these things is as a technique for achieving classroom discipline. That's why I do this lesson very early in the beginning. I tell them I am still adapting to American culture, and some kinds of behavior really make me very angry or uncomfortable. I ask for their cooperation. There are certain kinds of behavior I find very distasteful and it's the kind of thing that Japanese in general find distasteful. If they want to achieve good or smooth communication with Japanese, they have to be aware of certain things.

I always teach the various common gestures, such as for indicating that something is delicious, for signaling for someone to come closer, and for meaning "money." I talk about eye contact, which was something I found difficult to get used to in the United States, where people look you straight in the eye from first acquaintance.

What students learn with their bodies, they won't forget. They may forget how to say "*Kon-nichiwa. Hajimemashite*" or "*Ohayō gozaimasu*"—they may forget the words—but they will not forget the body language. So in the future when they come into contact with Japanese, they will remember the body language. Their usage and accent may be wrong, but their body language will help those who meet them to trust them and feel at ease. ☺





Passing on Passion

Peggy Hagmann



Peggy Hagmann

Japanese-language teacher at North High School, Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Prize winner in the foreign-language education division of the 1995 American Teacher Awards presented by the Walt Disney Company and McDonald's. Former Spanish-language teacher

Interest in culture in the classroom often begins as an expression of curiosity by the teacher. A teacher who is interested in things—differences, similarities, characteristics—can be the driving force in learning. It puts us in the powerful position to *pass on our passion*. Teaching culture can be a vehicle not only for learning about another way of life but for encouraging students to seek and pursue things about which they feel passionately, no matter what it is. It can affirm that curiosity is good and important, now and throughout their lives.

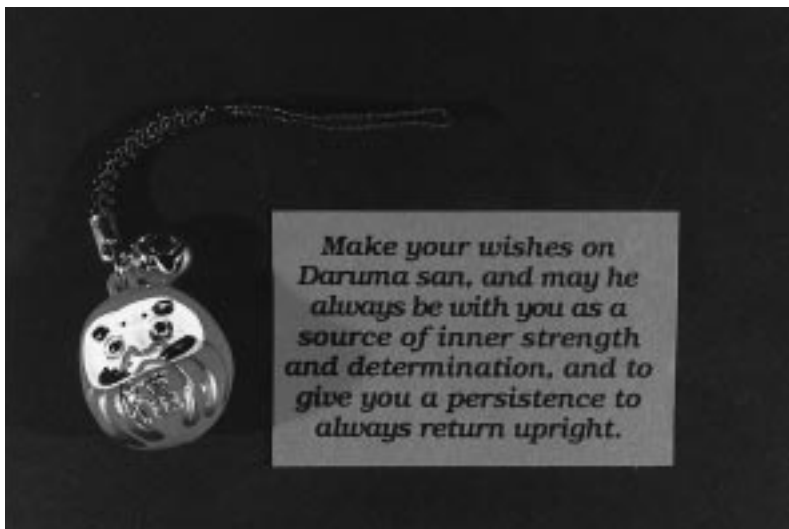
I approach the teaching of culture through what I call “Kyō no Bunka” (“Today’s Culture” or “Culture for the Day”). I have a sign hanging up in one corner of my classroom over the blackboard, and under this sign I write the word and various notes when introducing Kyō no Bunka. It is part of the way I keep my program organized. I introduce a wide variety of topics from broad conceptual themes to very specific, concrete things—from morning greetings to *mimikaki* (ear picks)—sometimes plan-

ning well ahead of time, sometimes on the spur of the moment. I don’t attempt to do a Kyō no Bunka culture point every day. I don’t let it become a burden. I chose when to present something—occasioned perhaps by a day that falls on one of Japan’s annual events (like Setsubun), by the visit of a guest from Japan, by a gift I’ve received from Japan or a question that comes up in the classroom. I always include language with culture.

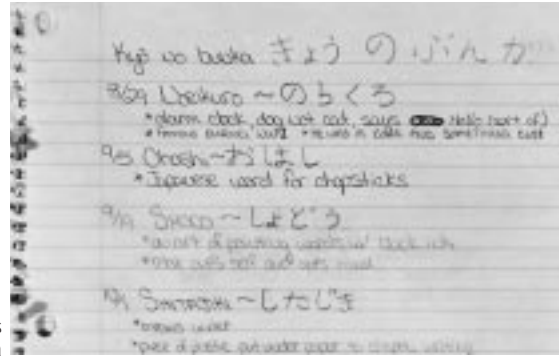
The teaching time for Kyō no Bunka is from 5 minutes to 5 days; I like it to be flexible, but organized. It can be adapted to any level, K through 12. Terms and expressions can be introduced as appropriate to the level, and the materials used include anything and everything Japanese, a *ramune* bottle, a *mimikaki*, or a Daruma figure. Or sometimes nothing, nothing tangible, that is. It can be simply to explain a particular topic, like “Shōgatsu” or “haiku.”

I write the term on the board, at the very first only in romaji, and after that in hiragana or kanji. The students are expected to be accountable for the information I tell them about each Kyō no Bunka topic, so when they need to, they take notes. I have them repeat the word over and over, and this repetition is important for unfamiliar terms. Then I demonstrate or tell a story. Since I am usually working in a team with a Japanese assistant, we may present a little dialogue, with myself as the curious American and the assistant as the Japanese, responding to my questions. Or, I may have a guest speaker who has brought a gift for the classroom or for me, and we talk about it and I ask questions about it. I always give the kids plenty of time to write what they hear in their notebooks.

The items used for Kyō no Bunka, which we keep in what I call the Bunka Bag, can be brought out and used over and over. For example, I started out one year with a Norakuro alarm clock. The alarm chimes with voice of



The souvenir Daruma Ms. Hagmann brought from Japan for her students with the explanatory note she always provides for Kyō no Bunka items



A student's notes
on Kyō no Bunka



After a class using the Norakuro alarm clock, one student who enjoys baking made this cake, decorated with the ditty heard from the clock, in hiragana

the little black and white dog saying “*Ohayō! Ohayō*,” so we can use this in the very first days teaching *aisatsu*. The Daruma figure can be brought back to use for eyes, nose and mouth, for “*Ikura desu ka*,” and many other things. I introduce *mimikaki* because it’s something we don’t have in American culture, but they’re a common sight in Japan.

Other topics that are keyed to certain times of the year are *seibo*, *nengajō*, Shōgatsu, etc. One brief topic I introduce is *nori*, because before we do *onigiri*, we have to know what *nori* is. I pass out pieces of *nori* and let the students touch, smell, and feel it, and then I give them *arare* with little specks of *nori* in it or wrapped in *nori*. Later, when we take up *onigiri*, they know what *nori* is and how healthy it is.

I organize the topics somewhat, making sure I cover seasonal topics at the right time of year, but otherwise move things around flexibly or shift them to Japanese 3 or 4, when the students will be ready for them.

The students take notes, some more carefully than others. I tell them a lot of detail and tell them that they are responsible for knowing the details. But I don't write it all down on the board

and I don't give them handouts. I make them responsible for keeping notes if they need to.

I don't check their notebooks or demand that they look neat and nice, but I tell them they'll have to study from their own notes, because there's no other place to look up these things. Some don't take many notes and some can be pretty sloppy; but what matters is whether they remember what I told them; they can each do it in their own way.

I do reviews and quizzes of the Kyō no Bunka culture points. This corner can be helpful in filling in extra time, too, if you finish early after a guest speaker or you have an extra pocket of time. I teach them phrases and terms to go with each topic, like “*Oni wa soto, fuku wa uchi!*” with Setsubun; “*Itadakimasu*” with *hashi*, “*nengajō*” and “*Akemashite omedetō gozaimasu*” with Shōgatsu. Big topics bring up smaller topics, perhaps better taken up separately.

It helps to personalize culture, by having a native speaker talk about topics, telling about personal experiences, and so forth. It also helps if students teach “Amerika no Bunka” to Japanese assistants or guests who come to the classroom. In this way, passing on passion also prompts students to teach the culture they have learned to friends, substitute teachers, parents, and family. 🌱



A student who carved the characters for "Japan" on a Halloween pumpkin, and her father

Japanese Language Study in the United States

Richard D. Brecht

Director, National Foreign Language Center, U.S.A.

Many, if not most, Americans are unconvinced that languages other than English are relevant to their lives. If they have thought about language at all, they basically believe that the learning of another language is unnecessary ("the world speaks English"), impossible ("no one really learns a foreign language"), or irrelevant ("most language courses fail to address my real world communications needs").

These attitudes result in the current situation in the United States, where only one third of students enroll in a language course at any level in the educational system. Of these, only approximately ten percent attempt a language other than French or Spanish, the only languages generally available at most schools and universities in the United States. Of the students who even attempt the "harder languages" (like Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Russian), only a small proportion ever reach even a basic level of functional proficiency.

The study of Japanese in the United States has to be considered against this broader context as well as in light of its difficulty for English-speaking Americans. Studies have shown that it takes approximately three times as long to reach a basic functional proficiency in Japanese as it does in French or Spanish. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that study abroad in Japan, the prerequisite for any degree of language mastery, is not generally accessible to most students, given the high cost for Americans to live and study there.

In spite of these obstacles, enrollments in Japanese language expanded significantly through the 1980s,* producing a spate of new programs at the school and college levels. This growth was supported by school systems, colleges and universities, as well as by private foundations and governmental agencies in the United States and in Japan.

There are now signs, however, that the situation of constantly expanding enrollments is over and that public and private sector resources supporting Japanese-language programming are shrinking. Now, as never before, strategic planning is required to ensure that future investment of resources will support the building of a strong field architecture capable of sustaining Japanese-language learning in the most effective and cost-efficient manner for the foreseeable future.

In response to this new reality, the Japanese-language field currently is engaged in a field-wide process which is unprecedented in American language education. The goal is to develop mechanisms to guarantee the health of Japanese language programming in the United States for the foreseeable future. The major Japanese language teachers' organizations, the Association of Teachers of Japanese (ATJ) and National Council of Secondary Teachers of Japa-

nese (NCSTJ), are joined in this effort by founders as well as by other national voices concerned with the language in the United States.

In the United States, a new vision on the future of language learning in the new world of global communication is emerging. This vision assumes that language programming has to do "more with less": more languages, more students, more tasks, more competencies; and it has to do all of this with steady or even diminishing resources. This new system (termed "System III") assumes that the language-learning programs of the future will "customize language learning" to enable students, whatever their interests and schedules, to select additional learning opportunities from an on-line menu of modules and tutorials, as well as learning communities.

This vision depends on full advantage being taken of the incredible advances in modern communications and information technology, particularly the WWW. It also assumes that language fields, and their representative organizations, will play a much stronger role in school and campus programming than they have in the past. In addition to providing services to individual members through conferences and journals, field-wide organizations will have to support the establishment and enhancement of programs in schools and on campuses. This will require that founders broaden their focus from strengthening individual programs to building strong language field architecture.

The Japanese-language field in the United States is particularly well positioned to implement a new vision of language learning, one more capable of addressing the changing Japanese language needs of the twenty-first century. The leadership of the field has begun the process. With great anticipation, we all await the results of their efforts.

* Draper and Hicks of ACTFL report that between 1982 and 1990 Japanese enrollments in public high schools grew from 6,246 to 25,123 and that "The fastest growing language continues to be Japanese, which almost doubled its secondary school enrollment between 1990 and 1994." The Modern Language Association reports that Japanese language enrollments between 1968 and 1990 grew tenfold, from 4,324 to 45,717.

How Can Culture Be Taught in the Classroom?

Points to Keep in Mind

This feature of our newsletter considers Japanese-language education, particularly at the elementary and secondary level, through the three presentations given in the TJF-sponsored session at the ACTFL conference. One of the most important purposes of teaching Japanese—or any foreign language—at the elementary and secondary level of education is to foster among students familiarity with other cultures and international understanding. The ways to achieve this goal presented in this session are summarized here.

Purposes

- * To contribute not only to knowledge of language but to the education of students in the broad sense
- * To expose students to unfamiliar languages and cultures
- * To foster communication skills through knowledge of culture
- * To cultivate students' interest in culture and motivation for learning

Foreign-language education, because it provides an opportunity for contact with a previously unknown language and culture, can be much more than simply the learning of language; it can contribute immensely to the education of young children in the broadest sense. The study of language and culture is useful in many ways in the development of young people's abilities: exposure to unfamiliar sounds and writing systems cultivates powers of concentration and perception; contact with other cultures enhances the ability to observe and enriches powers of imagination; learning to speak other languages brings with it the discovery of shared human traits and the awareness of universal human qualities that transcend culture.

In the course of such study, moreover, students begin to think consciously about language and culture, thereby acquiring heightened appreciation of and tolerance toward other peoples that can be catalysts for broadening their worldview.

Stance of Teacher

- * Curiosity, open-mindedness, and enjoyment

Particularly regarding foreign languages and cultures, students learn the most from the attitude and stance of the teacher himself or herself. Enthusiasm, open-mindedness, and enjoyment of learning another language and culture on the part of a teacher is infectious, readily prompting students to accept the challenges the teacher presents. An atmosphere in the classroom that is flexible about the mistakes students make is also very important for teaching a foreign language in a way that will promote cultural and international understanding.

Topics, Activities, Resources

- * Familiar, easily-understood topics
- * Activities that students can do and experience themselves
- * Practical items that will arouse students' interest

It is important to choose materials that are suited to students' age and stage of development and that are familiar and easily grasped. Their interest can also be aroused by incorporating information or topics about Japanese young people of their same age. At the elementary school level, songs, dances, and other activities with physical activity and use of the five senses, are particularly effective.

Points for Incorporating Culture

- * Emphasize critical thinking
- * Do not over-generalize
- * Encourage comparison with own culture

Above all it is important to have students think about the language and culture in question, rather than simply memorizing information. Care should be taken not to make statements that over-generalize about or stereotype Japanese culture. It is also important to have students look at their own culture and make comparisons, not only in order to notice the differences but to shed light on the common qualities that lie beneath the disparities. Also, by becoming aware of the fact that there are people of many different backgrounds within their own culture, they can think about the diversity within culture and realize the danger of generalization.

Methods

- * Promote visibility
- * Encourage students to take pride in what they learn

Understanding of the benefits of learning a foreign language can be achieved through cooperation with teachers of other foreign languages and by introducing culture in the broad sense through cooperation with teachers of other subjects. For example, Japanese geography can be taken up in cooperation with classes in social studies, animals of Japan in science class, and Japanese arts in music or arts classes. It is also important, of course, to let the school principal and administrators know the results and impact of such efforts.

Presentations directed at the family members of students, students not currently taking language classes, as well as for the community and for other schools can be effective in garnering support. Such presentations need not be held only by teachers; it is valuable to have students themselves make presentations about what they have learned. Positive response to their efforts enhances their confidence and involvement.