

Feature:

Meeting People Really Makes a Difference



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Meeting People Really Makes a Difference

In order to learn how to really communicate in another language and to understand the culture that forms the background to the language, nothing is more useful and effective than meeting the people who speak that language and direct experience in the environment where they live. Not all students of a foreign language, however, can enjoy the luxury of first-hand experience in the country where it is spoken. It is up to teachers to devise means for vicarious cultural encounter that will help students cultivate a deeper understanding of culture and a better appreciation of the language they are studying. This issue introduces two Japanese-language teachers and what they are doing to give their students this experience of encounter from afar. Their accounts also show how they have used photographs and profiles of individuals to give students the opportunity for a kind of vicarious encounter. (The texts below were prepared by TJF based on presentations given at the TJF-sponsored session, "How Can Culture Be Taught in the Foreign-language Classroom?" during the annual meeting of the American Council on Teaching of Foreign Languages in Chicago, November 1998.)

Encounter in Education: Path to the Profiles Project

Cyrus Rolbin

My involvement in the project to compile profiles of Japanese individuals as a means of introducing society and culture to students of Japanese language overseas began during my experience teaching English under the Japan English Teaching (JET) program a few years ago.

As a college student in New York state, I had become concerned about how schools were finding it increasingly difficult to guide students in areas such as moral development. At a time when the divorce rate is high in the United States and many young people don't have parents who can guide them in making tough decisions or dealing with crises, some values may need to be learned as part of the education system and encouraged by it. For example, sometimes we need to make our personal concerns secondary and think about helping our friends or colleagues first. I had been impressed by Mahatma Gandhi's rule that intellectual life shouldn't be separated from the nitty-gritty of daily life, and by what I had heard of the practice in Japanese public schools of having the students keep their own school clean. I wanted to go and see a society where that idea was being put into practice.

Employed as a part-time teacher in a number of schools in a place called Kurume in Kyushu, I did indeed see students cleaning their schools and I got to know a lot of my students and learned a bit about the teaching of English in Japan. When I asked other teachers about the

"moral education" system, however, their response was "Well, we don't really like it much." I didn't get the information about philosophy of education that I had hoped to obtain. Thinking I had come to the wrong place, I went to Tokyo during my vacation and interviewed a professor at Rikkyo University and officials at the Ministry of Education, and finally I got the answers I thought I had been looking for.

▶▶ Connections on the Ground Level

What I learned in Tokyo satisfied my intellectual curiosity, but after my teaching experience in Kurume, I realized that there was a big gap between what the scholars and the officials said and what was really happening in the schools. I had not gone to the wrong place after all. I had come to Japan with my liberal-arts mentality and my Western assumptions, and suddenly I began to feel that I was floating above everybody and not really living. I decided to abandon my lofty academic mission for the time being and I did a home stay. I made it my mission for the next year to make friends. I did make many good friends.

I found that it was extremely interesting talking to the mothers of school children and other people who were connected on the ground level to life, to practical values, to dealing with society and the education system. I realized



that the formal, generalized traditions and customs of a people are one thing, but the far more diverse, individualistic way people actually live is often much closer to reality. Japanese eat rice. Yes, this is true, but when you get to know, you learn that they also eat bread, pasta, potatoes. Beyond the stereotype there is a rainbow of variety.

There were a number of ways I learned from my experience in Japan that I am now trying to pass on to my students. First, I realized that it is an extremely multifaceted place. I admit that I had had a rather uniform image of Japan in my mind before I went to live there and I learned, from meeting all kinds of people, that homogeneity of race or ethnicity don't have anything to do with diversity of personality and lifestyle. Obviously, all Japanese are not the same.

Second, some aspects of Japanese people's lives are distinctively Japanese. Americans have a tendency to think that their values are universal and that the world is all just one big, happy place. They assume that they can just express themselves the way they are accustomed to expressing themselves and they'll be able to establish a good rapport with anyone anywhere. That can be a very problematic approach at times. We need to learn the norms and manners of whatever culture we visit.

But, third, some aspects of Japanese lives are universal as are those of any people. So you cannot just adopt some kind of formula for communicating with a Japanese person, like bowing to the proper degree and saying "Sō desu ka" at the right times, and expect to automatically make friends. You have to remember that you are dealing with other human beings, like yourself.

►► Bringing Encounter Into the Classroom

In realizing these three things, *encounter* is extremely important. Those of us who have had a chance to go to Japan—or to other countries—know both the joys and the agonies of learning culture and establishing understanding through personal experience, and we have grown from it. It would be great if all students could have such encounters, but that's not realistic for everyone. I began to think I could bring such encounters to my students in other forms. This led me to the project to write profiles of Japanese of my acquaintances. My approach to teaching has been to create classes in the image of my own personal experience in Japan. Even if my students couldn't meet the people I'd met personally, they could, through reading, get a sense of having met them.

The interviews turned out to be far more intriguing and

thought-provoking than I had imagined. The friends and others to whom I was introduced to compile these profiles shared with me fascinating stories of their lives and went into their particular circumstances and perspectives in much depth. I also believed that I could make these stories more vivid for my students by showing them pictures of the subjects of my profiles.

And here is where my project and the TJF High School Students Photo Contest project came together. TJF arranged for me to interview Hino Takashi (see photos on p. 6), the subject of one of the top prize-winning entries in the contest. Hino told me how far he had come from being a poor student in junior high school. He related how he had really disliked *kokugo* (Japanese), math, and computer science. He got into a high school where graduation is based on number of credits and the curriculum is not rigidly set. In the face of the freedom he encountered at that high school, he realized his responsibility to educate himself and ultimately ended up taking—*kokugo*, math, and computer science. Once the importance of being able to use language effectively dawned upon him, he began to study hard, and he has developed quite a passion for mystery novels and wants to write one himself.

Takashi's story, like that of many of the other people I interviewed, illustrates how some aspects of their lives are inimitably Japanese and others are just human. Students can therefore read such profiles as something germane to their own existence; not stories of mysterious figures in exotic lands far away. They may very well have American friends who had experiences very much like Takashi's.

For those of us who are high school teachers, helping students to set themselves on a solid course in life—to know how to make moral and intellectual decisions—is part of our work. In teaching about Japan, I believe we can show some of the lessons to be learned from life and thereby prepare our students for adult life. It will go a long way if they can learn to avoid stereotypes and recognize both the cultural and the universal dimensions of human responses and personalities. The variety of human life is an educational treasure house. By striving to make the content of education more concrete and personal—more alive with living, breathing human beings—we can make our teaching more effective. 🍀



Beyond Language and Culture: Teaching Japanese

Tsuda Kazuo

In the twenty-five years prior to 1995, the number of students studying Japanese language at secondary schools in the United States rose from almost zero to more than 40,000. Not all of these students, however, intend to become Japanese-language specialists, and, in addition to improving their language proficiency, we must keep in mind the broader educational aim of foreign-language educations which is to enhance students' understanding of culture. The problem is how to link these two goals in practice. Another challenge lies in determining what aspects of culture should be taught. The landmarks and traditions of so-called "big culture" and the intimate and personal minutiae of "small culture" are both very important, and how to teach them concurrently remains one of the key challenges for foreign-language educators.

The U.S. National Standards for foreign-language education, issued in 1996, sets forth the objectives of foreign-language education in terms of the "five c's": communication, culture, connection, comparison, and community. Culture is identified as a key issue: "Study of another language and culture enhances one's personal education in many ways. The study of another language enables students to understand a different culture on its own terms." How to apply this principle in daily classroom activities, however, is no simple matter.

In Japanese-language education, furthermore, before addressing these problems of language acquisition and cultural understanding we must consider the more important issue of individual education for each student. We are, first and foremost, teachers, educators. In order to cultivate each student's overall level of understanding and learning, we must keep in mind the broad guidelines for curricula and learning experiences under which we are operating. So far, Japanese-language education has not confronted the need for teaching at the secondary-school level to focus on the individual student's personal growth and level of understanding. We must address this need now by ensuring students' growth and understanding by stages at the individual level (from practical to mechanical tasks), utilizing the broad guidelines for curricula and learning experiences (e.g., the U.S. National Standards). How to teach personal growth is a major issue, especially in the Japanese language field.

▶▶ The Textbook as One Approach: *Kisetsu*

With these goals in mind, I and a number of high-school Japanese-language teaching colleagues have begun work on a new textbook entitled *Kisetsu*. This is an ambitious textbook designed not only for learning Japanese but also for developing the various skills students' require to develop well-rounded personalities, such as conducting surveys, making inquiries, drawing comparisons, observing, imagining, analyzing, thinking critically, and expressing themselves.

Kisetsu focuses on specific themes for each school year-level and is organized so that students acquire the target skills in stages. The themes for first-year students, for example, are "Encounter and Environment." In Unit 1, under the theme of "Encounter," students "meet" someone from a different cultural background, gaining an understanding of that person as they gradually gather information about him or her. In Unit 2, on "Environment," they learn about cities in Japan and the cities or towns they themselves live in, with each student eventually making a presentation to the class about his or her own town. Through each of these processes, students are given opportunities to improve their skills of investigation, comparison, analysis, expression and so on, while learning the simple Japanese sentence constructions to be mastered at the first-year level: *masu / mashita*, *arimasu / arimashita* and *imasu / imashita*. Naturally, the example sentences provided at this stage will be very different from those conventionally used. Clichéd examples such as "Toire wa doko ni arimasu ka" ("Where is the toilet?") are pointless. Instead, by using such model sentences as "Jibun no machi ni wa, hakujin ga X% imasu, Ajiakei no hito ga X% imasu" ("In my town, X% of the people are white and X% are of Asian descent"), the text allows students not only to study Japanese but also to link what they learn to social studies.

▶▶ Using Photographs

Visits to Japan give students studying Japanese at junior and senior high schools valuable experience through direct contact with Japanese people and culture. But not all



students can enjoy such firsthand encounter. This is where photographs can play an effective role as a kind of “virtual” substitute for actually meeting the students. In particular, photographs of people can be used in practical activities designed to cultivate students’ capacity for understanding others and talking about themselves, which is one of the ultimate aims of the first volume of *Kisetsu*. Photographs may be used at many stages of the learning process in keeping with the broad guidelines for curricula and learning experiences (the National Standards, Learning Scenarios, etc.). Let’s look at a couple of examples of classroom activities using photographs.

▶▶ Self-introduction

Using photographs from “the TJF Daily Lives of Japanese High School Students Photo Contest” is one way for American high school students to “meet” their counterparts in Japan. Because the photos were taken by the Japanese students themselves, they provide a student’s-eye view that makes it easier for American high school students to relate to the people portrayed. While gaining a better understanding of high school students in Japan, American students can use these photos as a basis for comparison with and discussion about their own lifestyle. This creates a meaningful context in which they can learn the sentence constructions and vocabulary needed for such discussion. Using photographs showing club activities in Japan, for instance, students could practice verb usage while talking about their own club activities, using sentences like “barēbōru o shimasu” (“I play volleyball”) and “basuketobōru o shimasu” (“I play basketball”). With photographs about food, they can practice sentence patterns such as “X ga suki desu” (I like X) and so on. Another effective

approach would be to have students take photographs depicting their own daily lives and use them as a basis for class presentations.

▶▶ Personal History

After viewing photographs of Tsuda Umeko and other famous people, students could practice constructions such as “. . . shimashita” as they study simple biographies of the people portrayed. In this way, students learn about history while improving their Japanese. They can also do a project whereby, based on photographs and background information of a high school student their own age, each student compiles an imaginary personal history as if he or she were the person in the photograph.



Photo: Tsuda College

Tsuda Umeko
1864-1929; well-known educator
and founder of Tsuda College

Through interdisciplinary, project-oriented Japanese-language studies, pursued in stages in accordance with broad educational guidelines (the National Standards, Learning Scenarios, etc.), and through interaction both with people from different cultural backgrounds and with the students’ own environment, *Kisetsu* aims at fostering high school students’ overall personal development. It is hoped that, through this text, regular classroom Japanese-language study can be pursued in conjunction with activities that enhance cultural understanding, so that students can develop a range of skills, including cultural literacy.

Kisetsu

This is a four-volume textbook for American school students from ninth through the twelfth grades. Volume 1 is currently at the production stage. In accordance with the latest U.S. curriculum guidelines, the text is based on topics, tasks and interdisciplinary projects rather than on the conventional approach of grammar-accumulation, and includes many practical activities, drills and role-playing exercises. The ultimate aim of the text is to give students conversational skills for practical communication. The textbook includes many full-color photographs and illustrations, as well as comic-type drawings. ☺

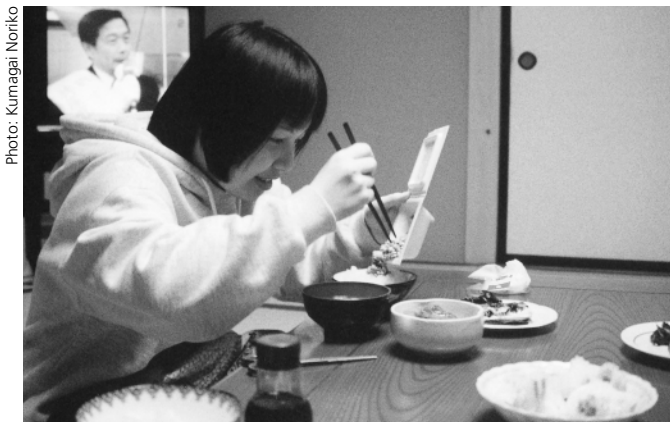


Photo: Kumagai Noriko

Lesson Plan Using Photographs: "The Way We Are" Collection

In searching for a good way to use the photographs that appeared in *The Way We Are—Japanese High School Students' Daily Lives* as teaching materials, TJF worked with two Japanese-language teachers, Arakawa Yōhei (Japanese-language lecturer, the Japan Foundation, Japanese Language Institute) and Yabe Mayumi (Japanese-language teacher, YMCA College of English), to compile sample lesson plans. We hope you will find it useful. Perhaps it will help you think of other, original ways of putting these photographs to use in your classroom. If you come up with good original ideas that your students find enjoyable and rewarding, we would like to encourage you to pass them along. Write us a letter or send e-mail to forum@tjf.or.jp. TJF looks forward to hearing from you!



Hino Takashi, in *The Way We Are*

Preparations

1. Sets of A3-sized (297 x 420 mm) photo panels. The photos are selected from the TJF's photo contest entries and each set consists of 5 photos showing one high school student's daily life. The more sets you can show, the easier it will be to illustrate the diversity among Japanese high school students.

The photos used in this lesson have been chosen especially because of ways they contrast with the traditional materials used in Japanese-language education. Instead of idealized images of supposedly typical high school students, they are snapshots taken by the students themselves showing the actual daily lives of individual students. This class focuses on sets of photographs that show the daily routine of individual students.

2. Explanatory text in Japanese and in English about the high school students given with the photo panels (from *The Way We Are*).
3. Worksheet
A sheet may be prepared to explain relevant vocabulary. You may also give the photos to one or more students in advance and have them prepare the explanations.

Objectives

Cultural aspects

1. Replace stereotyped images with a variety of real images showing how individual students actually live. At the same time, in order to avoid creating new stereotypes, be sure to provide ample explanation reminding them that each set of photos reflects the perspective of the individual high school student who took the photographs.
2. Persuade students to reconsider their ideas not only about Japan but also about their own country and themselves as well.
3. Encourage students to seek a deeper understanding of the lifestyle of someone of their own generation who happens to live in Japan. Avoid generalizations and stress that the photographs provide glimpses of specific individuals' daily routines and the society they inhabit.
4. Encourage students to consider the differences and similarities with their own lifestyles, to imagine how they might feel in a similar situation, and think about the topic in new ways.
5. Encourage students to appreciate the wealth of visual information contained in the photographs and utilize that information to elicit verbal communication in Japanese.

Grammatical structures

- ~と思います / 思う
- たぶん・きっと
- ~かもしれません / かもしれない
- ~でしょうか・~でしょう・~ないでしょう
- ~らしい・~みたい・~よう
- (adj.) そうだ
- ~ているところです / ところだ
- AよりBのほうが~

Procedure

1. Confirm existing images asking questions

At the beginning, have the students talk about whatever images they have about high school students in Japan and discuss any stereotypes they may hold.

Some possible questions:

- どんな服を着ていると思いますか。なぜですか。
(What kind of clothes do you think Japanese high school students wear? Why?)
- どんな学校だと思いますか。
(What kind of schools do you think they attend?)
- なにを食べていると思いますか。
(What kinds of food do you think they eat?)
- なにが好きだと思いますか。
(What kinds of things and activities do you think they like?)
- しょうらのゆめはなんですか。
(What kinds of hopes for the future do you think they have?)

If any of the students have Japanese pen pals or have hosted Japanese student in their homes, have them talk about their impressions.

- 日本人の友だちがいますか。日本人の高校生に会ったことがありますか。
(Do you have any friends who are Japanese high school students? Have you ever met a Japanese high school student?)
その友だちについて話してください。
(Tell us about your Japanese friend.)
(その友だちは 学校でどんなことをしていますか。
(What do they do [what does your friend do] at school?)
好きなもの、好きなことはなんですか。
(What kinds of things and activities does he/she like best?)

2. Having confirmed the students' existing images and taken note of those that may be based on unreliable information, present one of the sets of photo panels and ask some questions about

the student portrayed there in Japanese, using grammatical forms the students have already studied. Here are some possibilities:

Yes/no questions, such as この人は男の子ですか (Is this person a boy?) and この人は 人ですか (Is this person a (adjective indicating nationality) person?).

Choice questions, such as この人は中学生ですか、高校生ですか (Is this person a junior high student or a high school student?)

Questions about what's in the pictures, such as なにをしていますか (What is he doing?), なにを着ていますか (What is he wearing?), or どこですか (Where is he?).

Secondary-level Japanese-language textbooks usually have illustrations and the like, but few feature photographs. These photographs will probably be your students' first glimpse of what high school life in Japan is really like. As their imaginations are being stimulated and as they give their answers in Japanese, the students may truly have their eyes opened. In this way, stereotypes can be broken down and the gap between images and reality can be bridged.

3. Present basic information

Once you have finished with preliminary questions, you may provide the students with some basic information. Use written explanations from *The Way We Are*, in English or Japanese, as your reference source. In presenting explanations, either Japanese or the students' native language may be used, but it is important to make clear that the photographs show real Japanese high school students. Through this input and interaction, students can obtain reliable information about the Japanese students featured in the photographs.

4. Group exercise

a. Divide the class into several groups and give each group one set of photographs. Have each group discuss what they see in their photos—what the subject is doing and when, where he/she is, how he/she probably feels, and so on—and then have them prepare a summary of the points made in their discussion for presentation to the rest of the class.

Worksheet

1. このしゃしんは、たかしくんが、_____しているところです。

(1) たかしくんのよこにいる人はだれでしょうか。

(2) 二人はどんなことを話していると思いますか。

2. たかしくんは どんなふくを 着ていますか。それは せいふくですか。

3. みなさんの学校の教室と、このしゃしんの教室とくらべて、どうですか。にいますか。ちがいますか。

4. たかしくんは、どんなかおをしていますか。つまらなそうですか。たのしそうですか。たかしくんは、今、どんな気もちだと思いますか。どんなことをかかえていると思いますか。

b. Distribute the worksheets that go with each photograph and have each group discuss their photos by addressing the questions on the worksheet. (See the attached sample worksheet.)

c. The worksheets could also include explanatory text in Japanese regarding the photographs (from *The Way We Are*), to be employed as resources for reading comprehension exercises.

d. Each group makes a presentation before the

rest of the class, using the written summaries.

5. General discussion

Depending on the ability level of the students taking part, you might steer them toward a discussion of something more abstract, such as the apparent attitudes or feelings of the people in the photos. In doing so, it is important to encourage students to identify points of comparison between what they see in the photographs and their own daily lives. One purpose of the lesson is enable students to get beyond superficial differences and see that these Japanese students are ordinary people with their own ambitions, hopes for the future, and occasional frustrations, and, above all, that they are leading average lives. If your students understand that, then the lesson can go beyond a mere one-way flow of information and help them to share something deeper.

さんをどう思いますか。

(What do you think of --?)

さんについて、ほかにどんなことを知りたいですか。

(Are there other things you'd like to know about --?)

さんに聞いてみたいことはありますか。

(Is there anything you'd like to ask --?)

自分と さんと似ているところはなんですか。ちがうところはなんですか。

(What similarities are there between him/her and you? What differences are there?)

6. Further expansion

a. In order to simulate a situation of actual communication between your students and their counterparts in Japan, have your students write letters to the Japanese high school students in the photos (if not to be actually sent then as a writing exercise). To provide the students with reference resources for use in writing letters, show them Data on the Subjects of the Photographs (*The Way We Are*, p. 61, either the Japanese or the English version) and Glossary (*The Way We Are*, pp. 62 to 63, in English, or a translation of the English into simple Japanese). In their letters, the students can pose questions related to the information presented in these sources.

Writing a message to the photographer via the TJF website bulletin board will also be interesting! (See page 14.)

b. A look at one day (speaking, writing, performing)

Taking advantage of the fact that the photographs are sequential, you can have them arranged in order to represent a day in the life of a Japanese high school student and have the students describe or write about this or act out the role of a Japanese high school student in class. You might have your students invent backgrounds for the people in the photographs, including such details as names, family situations, hobbies, and the like, or imaginary accounts of conversations that might be taking place in the scenes pictured. This can provide an ideal opportunity to learn to distinguish between certainty and educated guessing based on available information.

Another possibility is to elicit suitable captions or titles for the photos. You could also have your students describe their own daily routines in Japanese. Depending on the students' ability level, you can have them either produce a series of simple sentences to describe the actions and activities in the pictures or encourage them to use linking forms, such as verb-て, verb-てから, verb-たあとで to describe sequences of actions.



The Way We Are

210 x 297 mm / 64 pages / color / published by the Japan Forum in November 1998 / In English and Japanese

The Way We Are is a bilingual collection of photographs of contemporary Japanese high school students as seen by their peers, selected from among 1,110 photographs of 222 high school students throughout Japan, entered to the 1998 TJF photo contest on the theme of the daily lives of Japanese high school students. The photographs are accompanied by messages in Japanese with *furigana* with English translations and information about the subject of the photographs.

"Data on the Subjects of the Photographs" and a "Glossary" are appended at the back of the book. Those interested in obtaining a copy, please contact TJF.