

Dreams and Career Planning

When Japanese students think about their future, what kinds of occupations do they seek? What kinds of careers do they choose? Career education is recently attracting a lot of attention in Japan, and students from elementary school through graduate school are being encouraged not only to learn about different kinds of occupations but also to better understand themselves and their aptitudes so that they can make informed choices. In this issue, we report on career-related trends among Japanese students.



This mark indicates that more related information is included on the "Click Japan" website. <http://www.tjf.or.jp/clicknippon/>

Popular Occupations



What are the occupations Japanese elementary and secondary school students aspire to? The occupations that are most popular tend to reflect the social and economic conditions of the times, with some variations according to regional circumstances. The current popularity of video game developer, for example, reflects the boom in the digital games industry, and growing interest in care giving and home helper services reflects the aging of Japan's population. Other occupations, such as teaching, medicine, and the civil services are always popular career choices, regardless of the time period.

Top 10 Choices of Future Occupation	
Junior high school boys	Senior high school boys
1 Baseball player	1 School teacher
2 Soccer player	2 Public service employee
3 School teacher	3 Doctor
4 Doctor	4 Physical therapist, medical technologist, dental hygienist, etc.
5 Public service employee	5 Pharmacist
6 Technician, engineer, mechanic	6 Police officer
7 Car mechanic, car designer	7 Researcher, university professor
8 Video game creator, video game programmer	8 Technician, engineer, mechanic
8 Public entertainer (such as singer, voice actor, comedian, etc.)	9 Jurist (lawyer, judge, public prosecutor)
10 Jurist (lawyer, judge, public prosecutor)	9 Fireman (rescue officer, emergency medical technician)
Junior high school girls	Senior high school girls
1 Nursery school / kindergarten teacher	1 School teacher
2 Nurse	2 Nursery school / kindergarten teacher
3 Cartoonist, illustrator	3 Nurse
4 Public entertainer (such as singer, voice actor, comedian, etc.)	4 Pharmacist
5 Beautician, hairdresser	5 Physical therapist, medical technologist, dental hygienist, etc.
6 School teacher	6 Public service employee
7 Animal trainer, zoo keeper	7 Doctor
8 Cake baker, pâtissière	8 Nutritionist
9 Designer (fashion, etc.)	9 Care worker, home helper
10 Translator, interpreter	10 Counselor, clinical psychologist

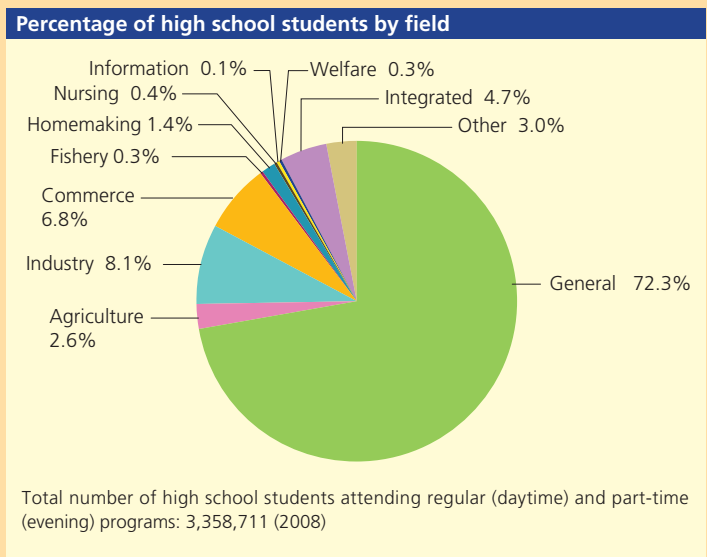
Source: "First Basic Survey on Children's Lives," 2005. Benesse Educational Research & Development Center

High School Options, Post-High School Options



The improvement of the economy, along with the low birthrate in Japan, has made it easier for students to gain entrance to the high schools, universities, and other institutions of their choice. The proportion of students who went on to high school in 1974 was a little over 90 percent and now stands at 98 percent.

Japanese high school curriculums are divided into three types: general, specialized (or vocational), and integrated. Specialized curriculums focus on such fields as agriculture, industry, commerce, fishery, homemaking, nursing, information studies, and welfare services. Integrated curriculums, newly established in 1994, include courses of both the general and vocational types. In the past, high school students who studied under a general curriculum were generally expected to go on to university; those who pursued vocational curriculums tended to take up employment after graduation, mostly in jobs that put to use the knowledge they had acquired in their classes. Today, however, high school graduates have a diverse range of options. The adoption of integrated curriculums is intended to encourage students to keep their options open to either employment or further education after graduation. Since its establishment, schools adopting the integrated-curriculum are increased to about 300 in 2008. Also, many general



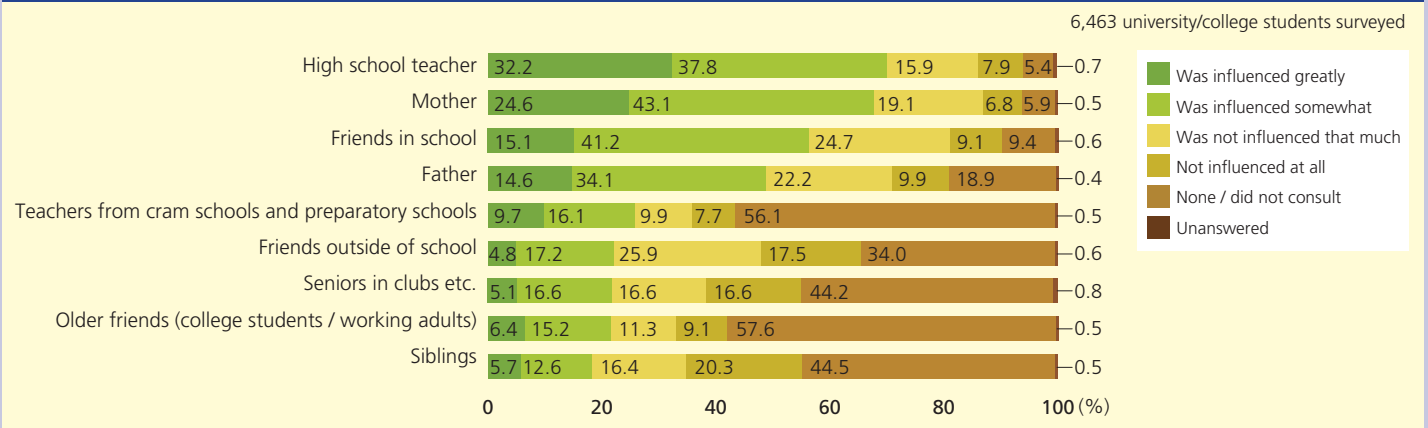
Source: "2008 Basic Survey of Schools," Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology

Whose Advice Influenced You?

Shiori, introduced in "Meeting People" in this issue, says her choice for high school was greatly influenced by advice from her

teachers. Whom do students talk to when they want advice on choosing a high school or university?

People Who Influenced Higher Education Choices



Source: "Survey of University Students Looking Back at Their Post-High School Graduation Plans," 2005. Benesse Educational Research & Development Center

curriculum high schools are starting to offer courses in specialized subjects, such as information, physical education, and English.

High school education in Japan is available in regular (day-time), part-time (evening), or correspondence school programs. Ninety-two percent of students are enrolled in daytime high school programs.

Higher Education Options



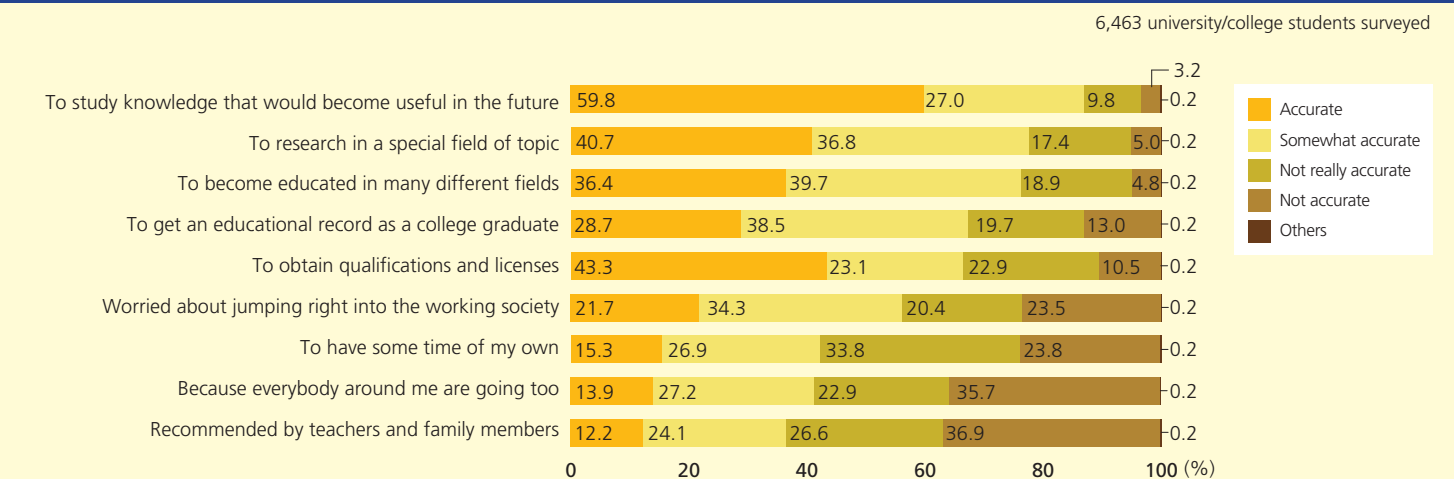
More students are also continuing their education at colleges and universities. The number has risen sharply since the establishment of special training schools (*senshu gakko*)* in 1976. In 1975, 25 percent of high school students went on to college or university, but in 2007, the proportion had risen to 75 percent, including those going on to *senshu gakko*. Because of the low birthrate, today any student who wants to go to university can be admitted somewhere, except for the most highly selective universities.

Kokubu Hiroshi, an expert at a company that has for many years provided high school students with information to help them determine their post-graduation plans, says "this situation allows many students to advance to four-year colleges not to study but simply to meet the demands of their parents. Many college students nowadays give little thought to the significance of working and supporting themselves after graduation."

According to the "First Basic Survey on Children's Lives" (Benesse Educational Research & Development Center), over 60 percent of students answered that they have a future career choice in mind, but nearly 40 percent of students answered "no" when asked if they are making a special effort to pursue such a career. Many of these students have in mind a job they would like to have, but they seem to have only a vague image of what is really involved.

*Specialized schools with courses in medical treatment, welfare, hair and beauty treatment, etc.

Reasons for Continuing Education at University/College



Source: "Survey of University Students Looking Back at Their Post-High School Graduation Plans," 2005. Benesse Educational Research and Development Center

Places to Learn About Jobs

How many occupations can you think of? Japan is said to have nearly 30,000 occupations, but the jobs familiar to elementary and secondary school students are limited to those of their parents and the people around them. In our time, when some 80 percent of the working population are employees of corporations, there are few opportunities for students to become familiar with the many different kinds of work to be done in society,

leaving them with limited awareness of the possibilities. The first step in the process of planning their futures is to learn what kinds of jobs exist, and to understand how these jobs contribute to society.

What opportunities do Japanese elementary and secondary school students have where they can learn about jobs or experience work firsthand?

Learning about jobs



©Gento-sha

The book *Jusan-sai no haro waaku* (Hello Work* for 13-year Olds), by well-known fiction writer Murakami Ryu, published in November 2003, introduces 514 jobs. It was an instant and long-term best-seller of over 1.3 million copies by 2007. At the official Jusan-sai no Hello Work webpage, which opened in 2005, visitors can search for jobs in many different ways. Under “Suki de shiraberu” (search by favorites), they can click on favorite topics like insects, dancing, or vehicles, for each of which a list of jobs pertaining to the selected topic is then displayed. Under “Omoide de shiraberu” (search by recollections) visitors fill in a survey about themselves when they were in elementary school, which then fits them into one

of eight categories, such as “disciplined achiever,” “dedicated servant of society” and “cheerful activist,” followed by a list of jobs suited for people of those types. Visitors can also ask questions of people who are actually working in the occupations that interest them.

Many other books, television programs, and websites besides “Hello Work for 13-year Olds” introduce jobs and give advice.

*“Hello Work” is the name of a government operated employment agency; here it is used to mean “looking for different kinds of work.”

License Academy ◀ <http://shinronavi.com/>

Tenshoku mitsuketai shushoku taiken Net ◀ <http://www.syokutai.jp/>

NHK Educational: Heisei wakamono shigoto zukan ◀ <http://www.nhk.or.jp/shigoto/>

Shorai naritai shigoto Navi ◀ <http://www.shigotosagasi.com/>

Learning the Fascination of Business

Opportunities for children to get a taste of various kinds of work are increasing. KidZania (<http://www.kidzania.jp/>) is a family entertainment center built on a model originating in Mexico that opened in Tokyo in 2006. At this theme park currently popular among elementary school students, children can play and learn as they experience over 80 different jobs.



© KidZania

Experiencing the work of firefighters at KidZania.

Since 2006, the “Chibinaga Shopping Street” opens for two days annually in Yamaguchi prefecture’s city of Nagato.

Chibi stands for *chibikko*, meaning (small) children, and naga stands for Nagato: it is a shopping street in Nagato made by and for children. The shops lining the street sell flowers, stationery goods, and baked goods, and there is a “Hello Work”



© Nagato Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Children can get a better understanding of what working is like by actually trying to do it themselves.

office (job placement agency), a bank, a newspaper publisher, and a broadcasting station. Elementary school children going to Chibinaga Shopping Street first go to the Hello Work office and look for a job. They are assigned a job and, after working for an hour, they receive play money called *chibii* that can be used in the shopping street to purchase goods. Junior and senior high school students are shop “owners.” They display goods and explain to elementary school “employees” about how they serve customers. They are in charge of accounting, too. Over 10,000 people visited Chibinaga Shopping Street when it opened for two days in February 2009.



© Nagato Chamber of Commerce and Industry

A snack shop, or *dagashiya*, at the Chibinaga Shopping Street. It was crowded with many children.

Expanding On-the-Job Experience Programs

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has adopted a policy encouraging schools to institute career education programs in elementary, junior high, and senior high schools. Such programs should emphasize experience in actual workplaces. A five-day job experience program for junior high school students called "Career Start Week" was launched in 2005; in 2007, 4,040 out of 11,000 schools took part.

Komatsugawa Daiichi Junior High School in Edogawa ward, Tokyo implemented the five-day job experience program in 2005. School principal Usami Hiroko says, "Students are familiar with a surprisingly small number of jobs. Many of them say they would like to become a public service employee, but they don't even know what kind of a job it is." First-year students begin by looking up information about jobs they are familiar with, and then learn more about the wide variety of occupations that exist. In their second year, students choose a workplace after deciding which job they would like to experience out of such general categories as sales and service, food and catering, crafts and manufacture, animal-related, energy, school-related, hospitals and welfare, and public and business offices. After the students finish their work experience, they each write a thank-you letter to the people at the workplace and make a newspaper-style report of their experiences detailing their impressions, what turned out to be really hard for them, and what they found rewarding.

Most students also realize through these experiences about the pride adults take in their work. They learn the difficulties, but also learn the satisfaction that comes with the completion of a job well done and the rewards it can provide. A third-year student who worked at a newspaper company said, "I learned how tiring it can be to work in a company. It was fun though. And I am always told in school to greet people properly and not be late, but I learned from my work experience how important that advice is to follow. I won't have to be told to do such things anymore."

Reflecting on the effectiveness of the job experience program, Usami says, "At first we were concerned about taking this many days out of regular studies for the program, but we found that students learn the value of their education through the job experience program, making school more meaningful for them. It is also important that our school and students have interacted with the local community."



The job experience program makes students aware of both the realities and joys of work.

© Komatsugawa Daiichi Junior High School

Why Career Education Now?

Since the burst of the bubble economy in 1991, Japanese style of management, which had long sustained the Japanese economy, has been critically reexamined, and the seniority-based, lifelong employment system has begun to break down. Attitudes toward work, meanwhile, have also diversified, especially among the young. Younger people are more likely to transfer to a different workplace with better conditions than to remain at a single company for their whole lives. But while employment patterns are diversifying, the practice of regular hiring of new graduates right after graduation is still the mainstream procedure, so it is still difficult to find a job later in life without some sort of advanced or specialized skills.

Amid these changes in the structure of society, NEETs* and temporary workers (freeters**) are increasing. There are an estimated 600,000 NEETs in Japan. Some people end up as freeters, without thinking very hard about it, out of their enjoyment of a carefree, relatively unrestricted lifestyle. Many NEETs are not aware of the many kinds of jobs that exist, or are unable to imagine what these jobs are actually like. People also become NEETs after quitting a job they chose based on vague images they had without careful consideration of their personal aptitudes and hopes.

Career education is receiving increased attention as awareness grows that young people need to understand themselves

and know their own aptitudes, develop the ability to choose their future path on their own, and have a solid and positive attitude toward work.

*NEET is the acronym of "not currently engaged in employment, education, or training." The Japanese government defines NEETs as persons between the ages of 15 and 34 who are not attending school, unmarried, or are not performing a job that earns an income.

**Short for "free arbeiter (from a German word meaning "worker")," freeter refers to those without regular fulltime employment who make their living with a succession of part-time jobs.

Let's Try!

Put in a check mark in the box next to the word that can be used as a Japanese word just as it is when expressed in katakana. Then write the word in katakana.

Example: School Teacher Engineer → エンジニア

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Soccer player | <input type="checkbox"/> Car mechanic | <input type="checkbox"/> Car designer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fireman | <input type="checkbox"/> Translator | <input type="checkbox"/> Illustrator |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Counselor | <input type="checkbox"/> Pharmacist | <input type="checkbox"/> Nurse |

Answers can be found at

<http://www.tjf.or.jp/takarabako/bi.htm>

Music or English: My Search for a Career to Use Both



Shiori

Osaka Prefectural Yuhigaoka High School

At the author's request, the name of the school is given with the express permission of her parents and the school.

Shiori's Profile

Favorite Japanese words and Osaka dialect words

ありがとう (*arigatou*, in Osaka intonation), めっちゃ (*metcha*, an Osaka dialect word meaning "very")

Favorite foreign words

Maori: *kiora/kia ora* (hello), *kia kaha* (be strong). *Kia kaha* is a word I will never forget. My friend wrote it in her letter to me.

English: awesome, appreciate

"Awesome" is a word I learned from a friend from England. I thought it sounded really cool.

"Appreciate" is also a wonderful word that I like.

What I want to do when I have time

Hang around with friends, visit friends overseas, rent the rest of "The O.C." television drama series, go shopping, play my favorite music, study foreign languages, study abroad, and go singing at a karaoke with my friends.

Favorite composers

Schumann, Beethoven, Bach

Both music and English are important to me. I practiced the piano from the age of four. When I was in fourth grade, a friend invited me to attend English-conversation school with her, and I've been studying English ever since. The school focused on conversation, and it was really fun. I've also been influenced by school dramas from English-speaking countries like "The O.C." I love how open the schools there seem, with no strict rules like we have in Japanese schools, and students being allowed to drive cars to school. I also love the way they speak English—though it's perfectly natural since they're native speakers. When I watch these dramas I often fantasize about what it would be like if I could live in such a world.

Choosing a High School: Music or English

There was a time, after I began taking English in junior high, that I didn't like the English classes in my school at all. All we did was study from the textbook, and that seemed really boring to me. In my second year, though, thanks to a good teacher, I began to enjoy English classes again. This teacher taught not only out of the textbook but introduced us to everyday expressions using worksheets prepared just for us. That teacher's fluent English and Spanish made me wish I could speak just like that. I really began to love studying English after I met that teacher.

When I entered junior high, I joined the swimming club^{*1} because it had more days off than the other clubs and that meant I could continue practicing piano. I was able to do both my piano lessons and swimming practices during my first year, but it

was really tough because I continued my English-conversation school classes and also attended a cram school in the afternoon. I finally reached my limit just as my second year began. While the swimming club had a rigorous practice schedule from early spring in preparation for summer competitions, I was also facing a piano competition and a concert by the students in the piano class coming up in the summer. I would not be able to practice enough if I continued both; it would have been too physically exhausting. For me, swimming was just a hobby; I decided that what counted to me in my future was music and English. Once I convinced myself of that, I quit the swimming club.

Then I began to seriously consider whether to apply to a high school where I could focus on studying English or whether to aim for Yuhigaoka High School, where I would major in music. I still had not made up my mind when other students began sending applications for high school entrance exams in our third year of junior high. My homeroom teacher was very caring, and gave all us students thoughtful advice on our plans after graduation. That teacher's advice one day gave me the push I needed: "You can study English later if you still want to. If I were you, I would try for Yuhigaoka High School." I knew that if I quit piano now, I wouldn't be able to do it better even if I wanted to later. I decided to study music in high school, and continue studying English on my own.

Studying Music

In the music department at Yuhigaoka High School, students study various aspects of music in piano (my major), vocal music (my minor), music theory, music history, and so on. There are plenty of opportunities for concerts, and there is also a study abroad program to Vienna. In piano lessons, students are re-



Shiori has a one-on-one piano lesson once a week with her teacher at school.

quired to truly understand the music at its deepest level when performing a piece. For example, I learned that even the process of using the pedals is different, depending on what the player wants to express. The teacher would often ask me what I was trying to express at a certain point while I was playing the music. Before high school, I had always thought that I was giving my best in my piano lessons, but now that I think of it, I did not really give any thought to expression at the time. I only began to realize how deep music is after I began studying in high school. I learned the joy of music, and I wanted to learn more.

Friends I Met Through Music

The classmates I got to know in the music department in high school are really special. One day, I suddenly couldn't go on playing in the middle of a piano test. That experience made me scared of performing in front of people, and it happened right before the piano competition. My classmates, guessing the fear that gripped me, suggested trying to play in front of a volunteer audience. I accepted their suggestion and tried practicing in front of classmates after school, and that helped me to pull myself together. I took part in the piano competition, and I did all right. That's what fellow musicians will do for you, I realized. Friends in junior high were fun to just hang around with, but my classmates in high school are people who share their love of music, and who are striving together to get better at what they are doing. Seeing how hard everyone around me is studying encourages me to do my best, too.



Shiori with classmates in the music department.

International Exchange in Yuhigaoka High School

I didn't know until after I entered Yuhigaoka High School, but I soon found out that it has vigorous English-language education and international exchange programs. Lucky for me! Many exchange students come to our school from different countries—both for short- and long-term stays. During my second year I became an officer on the international exchange committee, where I was in charge of the planning and the managing of the welcome and farewell parties for the exchange students. Also during the summer of my second year, I took part in the English study abroad program to New Zealand. I had participated in programs for overseas training organized by my English conversation school and others, going to countries like Australia several times, so I thought to myself that for me the purpose of this trip should be different from other students taking part who would be going abroad for the first time; I should make an active effort to speak English as much as I could.

The school in New Zealand had a special class set up for the students from Yuhigaoka High School, but I asked the teachers to let me take part in the classes of the student who was my buddy*2 during our stay. He turned out to be a very busy student who was also a school leader, and he sometimes didn't seem to be that interested in getting to know me. I ended up not getting to know him very well partly because I found it difficult to catch what he said. I felt sad that, while watching him talking with his friends, I couldn't join in, even if I wanted to because I couldn't speak smoothly. I thought that if I could speak English better I could have been on better terms with him. Even today, when I look at his picture, my determination grows to study harder so that I can talk better to him the next time I see him. Of course I did make some one good friend with whom I still keep in contact. When I write to her before a concert about how nervous I am, she replies saying "Be confident and do your best!" My Japanese friends encourage me too, but when someone overseas says something like that, you feel a special connection and it gives you a lot of courage. I think back to the days I spent with the friends I met in New Zealand every day. That experience was something very special in my life.

I Want to Work Using Both Music and English!

When I was choosing which high school to attend, I thought I had to make a choice between music and English, but after I came to Yuhigaoka High School, I fell in love even more with both music and English. Now I want to aim for a career in which I can be engaged in both the music I treasure and the English I love, and teaching at the same time. I got interested in teaching because of my second year English teacher and my third year homeroom teacher at junior high. Like them, I want to become a teacher who can have a positive impact on the lives of students. After graduating from high school, I am thinking of studying to become a teacher.

*1 Most Japanese secondary schools have clubs students can choose to join and take part in after classes are over. School clubs are diverse, for all varieties of sports, arts, music, theater, science, language learning, computer, volunteer, and so on. Each club has specified days for practice and activities, and members of most clubs spend about two to three hours practicing each day.

*2 At the New Zealand school the Yuhigaoka High School students were paired up with buddies who showed the Japanese students around the school, had lunch with them, and took them out after classes were over. (The lessons taught were mainly ESL.)



Photo album Shiori made to introduce herself in New Zealand. It includes photographs of her family, her life at school, topics about Japan, and of her trips to other countries.