

# Japanese Immersion Programme – Japan Foundation Sydney Seminar

by Fleur Karasawa, St Mary's Diocesan School, January 2018

My own language learning began as a first year university student when I chose Japanese as an eighth paper for first year study of a Bachelor of Management Studies. I fell in love with the language and then the country, working, marrying and having children in Japan. It was in Japan that my teaching journey began and it was only four years ago that I retrained as a secondary teacher of Japanese, Business Studies and ESOL in New Zealand.

I chose to apply for the Japan Foundation Sydney Seminar as I work in a rural area where Japanese language classes are only offered in two secondary schools in the region and as a Japanese language teacher and ALLiS coordinator of a small cluster I am passionate about exposing both, primary and secondary school students to Japanese language and culture. I also value the importance of growing global citizens in a small community and providing such opportunities to students who would otherwise not be exposed to a culture and language beyond their own.

I had had little exposure to Japanese teaching strategies and resources and was excited at the opportunity to be able to expand my own repertoire and network with Australian Japanese language teachers who appeared to do amazing things in their language classrooms. It was also a chance to be immersed in the language and improve my own language skills which I could not resist.

I was not sure what to expect of the seminar, although I knew that everything I would be exposed to would be extremely valuable. My expectations were met well above and beyond anything that I could imagine. The sessions over the 3 and a half days of the seminar were held in total immersion Japanese by native speakers with a passion for their job and imparting their knowledge to us to enrich our skill sets. We were encouraged to think of the seminar environment as 'small Japan'. We listened, spoke, read, thought, ate, drank and breathed Japanese within the Japan Foundation environment.



NZ Participants with JF Coordinator Maki Russell-Smith  
second from right: Fleur Karasawa

During the seminar we attended sessions covering; resource sharing from each teacher, activities for the Australian Curriculum – also applicable to the New Zealand Curriculum, ICT in the Japanese language classroom, language lessons, focused on improving our own language ability as well as strengthening our understanding of the Japanese school system, and hands on application of ICT in the classroom, where we had to develop a resource using a new tool introduced to us. Sessions also covered; Japan Foundation resources available for use in the classroom, including textbook and website resources and how these resources are used in the classes their staff teach. We were exposed to cultural lessons, of calligraphy, where we got to practice and produce a work art, with one on one support where required, a furoshiki workshop in which we practiced wrapping, folding and tying, tissue boxes and wine bottles. This is a cultural activity that can be easily replicated in the classroom for many different levels with minimal preparation and was a favourite of mine as I have always love furoshiki and the Japanese art of wrapping. Finally, a session on 'What's new in Japan' was very valuable for me personally as it has been a number of years since I lived there. We were updated with current popular language, the effect Shan Shan the new Panda has had on Japan and Robots in Japan. All topics can be simply embedded into classroom teaching

The hands-on experience from activity development, intensive language immersion, including testing and analysis of our own language, networking with Australian teachers, learning their curriculum as well as how and what they teach in the classroom, up to date knowledge of what is happening in Japan, the latest vocabulary, technology, and websites to use in the classroom will all benefit my students immensely. I am now a better equipped teacher with resources, strategies and language. The immersion environment that modelled 'small Japan' is an example of what can be replicated in the classroom and something I would like to improve in my own teaching at all levels from primary to secondary. I also now have the confidence to introduce furoshiki as a cultural activity into my teaching and I have developed a degree of confidence in my own language ability which I hope to impart on my students to encourage their development of Japanese.

I would recommend this seminar to anyone who is interested in upskilling their Japanese teaching skills, developing new resources and/or their own language skills. No matter what your level I believe there is invaluable learning to be gained from every session offered.