



Gleanings from the Distant Past

Ideas that Work for Me

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In this collection of ideas formulated since I first began teaching many years ago, I have attempted to share important things for a successful teaching career in world languages. My experiences in second-language acquisition as a teacher have been restricted to the “Less Commonly Taught” Japanese and Mandarin Chinese, but the suggestions should be equally applicable to all languages. I have also taught English as a Second Language (ESL).

My first teaching assignment was Evanston Township High School summer school in Evanston, Illinois. As a new graduate student in Asian Languages at Stanford University, I was skeptical when my professor told me that “once I stepped into the classroom I would know what to do.” So I was recommended to a summer position teaching one period of Japanese and one of Mandarin Chinese. Probably my youthful energy and enthusiasm got me through the hot, humid Evanston summer. The students, from all over the Chicago area, were so eager to learn that I decided I wanted to be a pre-collegiate teacher of world languages (then referred to as “foreign”). This was before national standards, state frameworks, and anything resembling a communication/competency-based textbook in Japanese or Chinese. Since that time, I’ve been able to gather ideas and strategies along the way to now share things I have found valuable to consider as a beginning or veteran teacher.

To begin, I have composed five C’s:

Caring—We must care about the students we teach; they are individuals and have individual needs. So, teachers must individualize and contextualize lessons for them.

Collected—We must collect and order our thoughts so that we can plan organized, logical, and interesting classes for our students.

Comprehensive—We must delve into topics in depth and in detail so that students will have a clear understanding of what they are learning.

Confident—We must demonstrate an air of confidence about what we are teaching so students know that we know what we are doing.

Consistent—We must follow through with what we tell the students we are going to do. Otherwise, they will think we are like the parent who threatens to ground a child and never does. The students won’t believe us anymore.

The first topic also begins with a “C” and is the all-important concept around which everything we teach revolves: CULTURE. This is what we refer to as the “Big C.” This is not the “Small c” that many beginning teachers mistakenly think is the crux of the language course. The Small c is sometimes characterized as “fun, foods, and fiestas” because often one-shot lessons not related to the lesson are built around a “culture” period. These are good as “fillers” but do not represent what I mean by culture with a big “C.” All language must be taught in the context of the culture(s) they represent. Japanese language cannot be divorced from its culture. Therefore, create a Japanese world in your classroom where everything will be taught with a Japanese “touch.” For example, greetings must be accompanied by the appropriate body language/gestures. Status, gender differences, age differences, and familiarity and distance must all be taken into consideration.

FIRST THINGS FIRST—Before you can begin teaching, it is important to plan what you will be doing. This means, what is the end product going to look like? What should the students be able to do at the end of each session, week, month, semester, and year? In order to accomplish this, you can “plan backwards;” you can begin at the end product and move backwards to see what steps must be taken chronologically to accomplish that goal.

OVERDO IT—You can over plan to always have a backup in case the audio or videotape you planned to show breaks. Don’t spend the remainder of the period trying to fix a VCR. Just

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move right on to another activity. This is also true of overhead projectors, so if the bulb goes out, keep teaching and don't fuss with fixing something. Do that after class.

POLICY STATEMENTS—Have a set of classroom rules that will help students to interact appropriately when they come to class. Behavioral rules are very important because they will help you to remind students about your expectations. You can have the students read the rules together in class, take them home and have their parents sign that they have read the rules (they don't necessarily have to agree with everything) and understand what the expectations are to succeed in your class. I have appended a list of topics you may want to cover in your rules at the end of this essay.

OPENING DAYS—What to do the first day of school? That is a problem area for every teacher. These are some of the most important things to do:

- Begin the first day with a greeting; later you can have a *Touban* (class monitor for the day, week, etc.) take turns doing the opening greetings: *kiritsu* (stand), *ki o tsuke* (attention), *rei* (bow), *onegaishimasu* (please teach us), and *chakuseki* (sit down)
- Check to make sure everyone there is actually enrolled in your class.
- Take roll to find out how your students say their own names so you can write them in *Katakana*. Also, see who prefers something other than what appears on the class roll, such as a shortened form of their name or nickname.
- Introduce yourself and teach the students how to say your name in Japanese. Remember to use the word *Sensei*, so that they will start calling you that instead of Ms., Mrs., or Mr.
- Have students fill out a short questionnaire that will help you get better acquainted with them. You can ask about their interests, why they signed up for Japanese, if they speak other languages, and if they have ever been to Japan or another country.

SETBACKS—There are days when nothing goes right. Don't get upset; things can always get better the next time. You may have days when your lesson plans fly like a "lead balloon." Don't worry. You can learn from mistakes.

BELL ACTIVITIES—These are activities for students to do as soon as they arrive in class. The mini-assignment can be on the board, or projected on an overhead. Ask the students to do some activity related to something they have been studying. For example, when they are learning *Katakana*, you can ask them to make a list of *Katakana* that are easy to remember because they resemble the *hiragana* they have learned previously (*u, ka, ki, se, to, ni, he, ya, ri*).

MUSICAL ACTIVITIES (Music videos are short, remember?)—Students today were weaned on short music videos, three to four minutes in length, so we must vary our activities during a period. Three to four activities per period will help keep their attention.

INTENSELY FOCUSING UPON THE TARGET LANGUAGE—The students won't learn Japanese when they don't hear it and don't practice speaking it. Remember that your class may be the only

opportunity the students have to use Japanese, so fill your forty-five minute class with forty-five minutes of *Nihongo*!

STUDYING IS A SKILL, TOO—Don't think that because a student has managed to reach middle or high school that s/he knows how to study. You can teach study skills at the same time you are teaching Japanese. Make sure that students write down your assignment (whether on a white board, overhead transparency, or on your personal web page). I give the students a blank assignment sheet in Japanese that can be filled out for four weeks. The students must hand in the completed assignment sheets at the end of each quarter for full credit. I also do a materials check to make sure that the students are bringing their materials to class. I compare this to the baseball player who goes to play a game without a glove, ball, or bat. How much baseball does that person expect to play without the equipment? Will the coach tolerate that for very long? I don't think so.

MR. MIYAGI—Remember that he was Daniel-san's mentor in *The Karate Kid*. We can all learn from more experienced teachers, both in World Languages and in other disciplines, who can give us advice about our lesson plans, classroom management, and especially the school "culture." Look around your school and find Mr. Miyagi because s/he will be glad to help you get started as a new teacher "on the block."

UPSTAIRS/DOWNSTAIRS (multi-level classes)—The dreaded fear of all teachers of "Less Commonly Taughts" is the split-level class combination of several levels of a language. One way to build class unity within a class is to have different configurations of the class setting on a daily basis. The two levels doing their own work, pairing upper/lower students to get help, doing group activities that students can do despite their differences in ability, and finally, whole group cultural activities, such as *kakizome* (the first calligraphy lesson of the year) to write auspicious sayings practicing using brush and ink.

THE BLIND MEN AND THE ELEPHANT (multiple intelligences)—When language classes are taught only one way, many students will get a limited view of Japanese. All content should be aurally, orally, physically, and visually taught. When introducing vocabulary, it is helpful for students to see an object, touch it, hear what it is called, see the word written, and learn to write the word themselves.

PARACHUTE INTO SHIJO-KAWARAMACHI (real world Japanese)—Prepare your students to interact with Japanese-speaking people everywhere. Teach them *authentic* Japanese for communication. Be careful to make distinctions between Japanese and non-Japanese usage of expressions. For example, the greeting *ikaga desuka* (How are you?) has much more frequent use in English than it does in Japanese. It cannot be used with someone you see on a daily basis; it is usually reserved for someone you haven't seen for some time.

The expression *konnichi wa* is reserved for outsiders and is not normally used with members of your own family. Some

expressions don't have English equivalents, such as *onegaishimasu* (the meaning changes depending on the context) and *sumimasen* (can be "thank you," "excuse me," etc.). Many paired greetings have no English equivalents (*itadakimasu*, *gochisousama* = beginning and end of meal), *itte kimasu*, *itterasshai* = one who is leaving and one who is staying behind). These expressions need to be taught in context so that students learn to use them naturally to fit the occasion. A final thought about expressions: most greetings in Japanese demand a response. To say *ohayou* (*gozaimasu*) in Japanese, one would naturally expect the listener to respond with an equivalent greeting appropriate to that person's age, position, etc. In English, such a greeting in current usage does not require a response. Often, people say nothing when hearing "Good morning."

LET'S GET TECHNICAL—When you have access to computers and the internet, by all means teach your students how to handle the Microsoft Office applications. Start with Word; the first lesson can be how to use Romanization to type Hiragana/Katakana and teach them how to write their names in Japanese. They do know how to say and write their names in Japanese, correct? Next, teach them how to use the internet to search for information on given topics about Japan and Japanese culture. There are neat tutorials for teaching writing on the Web.

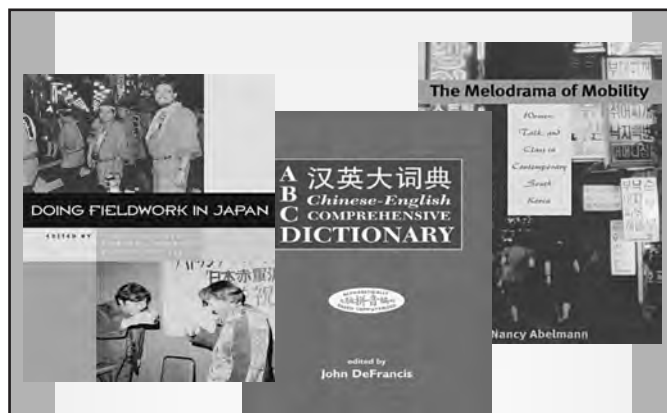
Later, you can teach them how to make Power Point presentations using all they have composed and have found to report. These reports are, of course, in Japanese. Although it does take time to organize yourself to do this, in the long run, your students will have invaluable skills that they will be able to use later and will thank you for teaching them.

A STUDENT FOREVER—There is a Chinese expression that says *huo-dao-lao, xue-dao-lao*, literally "To live to old age and to study to old age." There is still so much to learn that we cannot possibly stop learning. Whenever I visit someone's class, I always take away an idea for how to teach something I didn't know before. Keep your eyes and ears open because you don't know where these "gems" of learning are lurking.

APPENDIX A

It's all in the Rules:

1. Tardy and attendance policies.
2. Necessary materials to bring to class (I have them bring their pens, pencils, red pen, eraser, and pencil sharpener in a Japanese pen case) and what to have on their desks (pen case, necessary books, workbooks, Japanese notebook, etc).
3. Rules for speaking in class (hands up or what you want your students to do when they want to say something).
4. No-no's in class: Hats/billed caps (not appropriate in a Japanese classroom), listening devices and electronic games (prevent them from paying attention in class), cell phones and pagers (should be used outside of class and kept turned off in their backpacks while in class), chewing gum (messy and inappropriate in a Japanese classroom), eating/drinking (this



Doing Fieldwork in Japan

Edited by Theodore C. Bestor, Patricia G. Steinhoff, and Victoria Lyon Bestor

\$55.00, Cloth; \$22.95, Paper

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is not a cafeteria—only exception is when we do units on Japanese food), feet on/sitting on desk (rude and inappropriate in a Japanese classroom), and finally grooming—combing/brushing hair, putting on makeup (once again rude and inappropriate in a Japanese classroom) is to be avoided. You may have other pet peeves but remember, your good excuse for banning many of these things you see going on in American classrooms is: “it’s not appropriate in a Japanese classroom.”

5. Expectations for taking quizzes and tests.
6. How to be nice to a substitute teacher.
7. Restroom breaks: I give two passes/semester that they can use to go to the restroom. If they don’t use them, they can redeem them at the end of the semester for extra points.
8. Homework passes: I give two passes/semester for emergencies when they don’t have time to or forget to do their homework assignment. Those also can be redeemed for extra points at the end of the semester.
9. Policies regarding lost or damaged textbooks.
10. Homework policy: Is it due at the beginning of the period and what happens when students don’t hand it in?
11. Your grading scale, whether or not you grade on a curve and how you calculate your final grades.
12. When you allow work for extra credit, be specific about how to do it and how many points maximum they can earn.
13. Finally, your expectations for behavior and what happens when students misbehave.

I realize that this is a long list, but remember that you don’t want the students coming back at you with “but you never told me I couldn’t do that.”

APPENDIX B

Reference shelf of books in Norman Masuda’s office:

These books are listed in ten categories with examples in each category for teachers to consider. I have used the examples and have found them helpful in my teaching over the years. These are not the only books available and there are probably many newer books you should examine. You may want to prepare your own list of books to keep on your bookshelf.

1. A Japanese-English dictionary arranged in Kana order, not Romanized, so students will be able to practice their ability to read words in Hiragana and Katakana.
Example: *The Kodansha Japanese-English Dictionary* by M. Shimizu, S. Narita. Tokyo, 1991.
2. An English-Japanese dictionary with Japanese pronunciation in Kana, no Romanization, so students will be able to improve their skill in reading words in Hiragana.
Example: *Kenkyusha’s Furigana English-Japanese Dictionary*. Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1991.
3. A dictionary of grammatical expressions and usage for teachers to consult when preparing lessons.
Example: *Kodansha’s Effective Japanese Usage Dictionary: A Concise Explanation of Frequently Confused Words and*

Phrases by Masayoshi Hirose and Kakuko Hirose Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2001.

4. A Japanese-Japanese dictionary with definitions aimed at Japanese middle-school students for teachers and more advanced students to use.
Example: *Reikai Shin Kokugo Jiten* (New Japanese Dictionary with Examples and Explanations) Tokyo: Sanseido, 1987.
5. A Kanji dictionary arranged by radicals with an index by Kana syllabary for teachers to instruct students in the use of Kanji dictionaries and for students to use individually.
Example: *Kodansha’s Compact Kanji Guide: A New Character Dictionary for Students and Professionals*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1992.
6. A Kanji book for students to look up the pronunciation, definitions, and stroke orders of the most commonly-used Kanji.
Example: *Basic Kanji Book*, vols. 1 & 2 by Chieko Kano. Tokyo: Bonjinsha, 1990.
7. A basic illustrated source of information about Japan and Japanese culture for teachers and students to use as reference.
Example: *Trend: Illustrated Japanese-English Dictionary of Things Japanese*. Tokyo: Shogakkan, 1999.
8. A standards-based text/reference book on teaching World Languages for teachers to consult.
Example #1: *Teacher’s Handbook: Contextualized Language Instruction*, 2nd edition, by Judith L. Shrum and Eileen W. Glisan. Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 2000.
Example #2: *Teaching Language in Context*, 3rd edition, by Alice Omaggio Hadley. Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 2001.
9. A book of important words that help one understand how Japanese communicate.
Example: *NTC’s Dictionary of Japan’s Cultural Code Words*, by Boye De Mente. Illinois: National Textbook Company, 1984.
10. A book of illustrations for teachers to use in their lessons.
Example: *1000 Pictures for Teachers to Copy*, by Andrew Wright. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1985.

NORMAN T. MASUDA, Chair, World Languages Instructional Supervisor, Palo Alto High and David Starr Jordan Middle School, was the first recipient in the Language Category of the Elgin Heinz Outstanding Teacher Award, 2002 (United States-Japan Foundation). A founding member and past president of the National Council of Japanese Language Teachers and the California Association of Japanese Language Teachers, he has served on the California Foreign Language Project Policy Board, Japanese SAT II committee, California State Single Subject Examination in Japanese, Languages Other than English Subject Review Panel for the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, and as consultant to the California State Department of Education. He has presented on topics related to language pedagogy, assessment, and the teaching of culture and published articles on teaching culture in the Japanese classroom and cooperative learning. Certified to teach Okinawan *Sanshin*, he has taught, performed, and presented since 1982.