

Reports on the 2008 Japan Foundation Training Programme for Teachers of Japanese in Europe

The Japan Foundation offers UK-based teachers of Japanese (in schools, further education and higher education) the opportunity to take part in a week-long summer study course in Alsace, France, alongside other teachers of Japanese from across Europe. In general, Week One of the course is aimed at those with 1 to 5 years' Japanese teaching experience, and Week Two is aimed at those with 5 to 10 years' experience.

This year, three UK-based teachers took part in the course: Toni Malone, a secondary school teacher of Japanese; and Kazuki Morimoto and Miyuki Nagai, both Japanese teaching fellows at UK universities. Their reports are below. If you are interested in taking part in next year's course, please sign up for the [JLE-UK email list](mailto:jle-uk@jpf.org.uk) or check our website (<http://www.jpf.org.uk/language/>) in Spring 2009.

Report by Toni Malone, Westwood Language College for Girls, Croydon, London. (Week One Participant)



Above: Toni Malone (left) and other delegates

During early July 2008 I was lucky enough to spend a week in the beautiful Alsace area of France with fellow teachers of Japanese from a wide variety of European countries. A large number of delegates attended from around Europe, with eastern European countries being especially well represented.

Sessions on various aspects of teaching were arranged over the period of five days. Each day was divided into three to four sessions, which dealt with areas such as "Teaching Japanese Grammar" and "Teaching Japanese Listening Skills". Delegates' target learners ranged from the very young at kindergarten through junior and senior high school to adult learners. As such, the delegates face a range of challenges in delivering appropriate and engaging content.

Each session was led by an expert in the field, who presented current and past methodologies for each skill (listening, reading, writing etc). This led, naturally, to much discussion amongst delegates and progressed to a number of teamwork sessions where we considered the difficulties we face as Japanese language teachers. Perhaps the most useful element of the course was the interaction between teachers, which allowed us to share practical tips, games and ideas for lessons that had been particularly successful in our own countries.

Each teacher was also asked to bring along something, a textbook, worksheet or other resource, which they had found particularly useful in their classrooms. All the resources created each day were added to this, resulting in a huge library of books, games, charts, diagrams and post-it notes decorating the walls and tables of our conference

room. Eventually the room itself became a huge visual source of creative inspiration as our individual ideas resulted in a communal outpouring of wonderful ideas and resources.

I took away a number of fresh ideas on teaching Japanese back to my workplace. I have already ordered a number of materials which I learned about through my time in Alsace and I suspect I will have busy times ahead of me replicating some of the excellent games and techniques presented by fellow delegates. During my time there I took on the role of "learner" as opposed to "teacher" and this allowed me to empathise with my own students. Those ideas which made me laugh, smile and really enjoy learning are the ones which I will reuse in my classroom. Perhaps the most valuable resource on this course however, was the delegates themselves. It was a huge pleasure to meet so many other teachers of Japanese - many of whom seemed to be teaching in quite unusual situations and locations facing considerable challenges. It was a privilege to be able to meet with and share ideas with some wonderful people.

Of course it wasn't all work - the centre is most happily situated on the "Route de Vin" meaning that we were able to sample some wonderful wines and great cuisine. It is one of the most stunningly beautiful areas of France and we all took advantage of this by hiring bicycles to tour the local villages and towns or simply walking through the local vineyards.

I would certainly recommend this course to anyone else looking for new inspiration in their Japanese teaching. For me, working in a rather stressful secondary environment, it was also a rare opportunity to take some time out from the frenetic atmosphere towards the end of the school year (writing reports, negotiating timetables, invigilating exams), and focus on developing one of the reasons why I became a teacher in the first place - my passion for Japanese and sharing that with my students.



Delegates on the Alsace Training Programme

Report by Kazuki Morimoto, University of Leeds. (Week Two Participant)

Stimulating lectures and workshops, passionate and friendly people, beautiful nature and excellent food and wine.... These were all precious and unforgettable memories.

When I heard about this training course via e-mail from the Japan Foundation London Language Centre, I thought it would be a perfect opportunity for me to review my teaching skills and methods and to update my knowledge of teaching Japanese as a foreign language. Looking back, although I had attended numerous seminars and workshops organised by the British Association for Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language (BATJ), I had hardly ever had a chance to participate in an intensive and comprehensive training course like this, where I could reflect and develop myself as a teacher of Japanese.

The second week training course consisted of both theoretical issues such as the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and the European Language

Portfolio (ELP), as well as practical themes such as material development, how to teach scripts and vocabulary, how to teach grammar, and how to teach conversation. There was also a useful session where each of us gave a short group presentation on Japanese education in our representative country, followed by questions and free discussions by all the teachers. The whole programme was so scrupulously organised, with a good balance of lectures, group discussions, tasks and kinetic activities, that I did not find the daily 9.30 - 5.30 schedule too long. In fact, even after the formal sessions of the day, our chats and discussions continued zealously until midnight in the form of socialising over Alsace wine.

Thanks to the many experienced teachers across Europe as well as the cordial support staff, not only did I gain knowledge of teaching Japanese but I have also learnt how to break the ice and enhance communication among new people, which I believe is the most important aspect for teaching a foreign language. I would definitely recommend the training course, and of course, I myself would love to join it again!

**Report by Miyuki Nagai, University of Sheffield.
(Week Two Participant)**

Until the opportunity to participate in this programme in Alsace came up, I'd always regretted not having the opportunity to attend a training course in Urawa with the Japan Foundation: unfortunately the timing, the location and the length of the course had never fitted in with my university calendar. Therefore, this 5-day intensive course in Alsace sounded very attractive to me.

Since I hadn't attended such a training course for a long time, once I started receiving e-mails asking me to carry out some pre-tasks from each instructor, I felt the need to get my skates on.



A picturesque Alsace town

The course had two main streams: Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)-based sessions and skill based teaching sessions. At CEFR sessions, the outlines of CEFR and the European Language Portfolio (ELP) were explained comprehensively, and it helped me to visualise its concept much more clearly. It enabled us to participate in the following workshops on Course Design using CEFR and the 'Can Do' statements more actively and effectively. Being in Alsace, in a French village with a German influence, surrounded by Japanese teachers from all over Europe, who mostly speak at least one or two European languages besides English, I saw at first-hand why CEFR was born. At other sessions, we were encouraged to design activities for kana classes, grammar classes and conversation classes, making the most of the teaching materials created by the Japan Foundation. Working with teachers from very diverse teaching backgrounds gave me an opportunity to see everyday teaching from different perspectives, which was very refreshing.

On top of the well-organised contents of the course, the extra curricula activities, such as walking through small villages or vineyards, cycling, or wine cave visits, were enjoyable and memorable. If you feel that you need to learn something, but there's not enough time to do so, try to squeeze in just one week: you won't regret it.