

I have been in Japan for almost three months now, but I feel like I am only now really getting used to my hectic work schedule. Running from Tsu Nishi to Tsu Shyogyo to the Board of Education and the Education center is becoming a regular routine for me, but it was easy to forget that I also teach at Rou Gakkou about once a month. When I first got here, I didn't have many scheduled days at Rou Gakkou, so I got used to my routine working in this neighborhood near the station. After going to Rou Gakkou for the second time this week, I am much more excited about working there in the upcoming year.

When I heard about the different parts of my job from Avery, I was surprised to hear that I would be teaching at a Deaf School. I wondered how I would be able to communicate with the students, and more importantly, how I could teach English. I was already nervous to teach students in a regular classroom setting so when I thought about teaching at a Deaf School, I really didn't know what to expect.

I was thrown into my new workplace the moment I walked into the teachers' meeting on my first day at the school. I was sitting with the English teacher in charge of team teaching during the announcements at the morning meeting when she suddenly jumped up and told me to introduce myself to everyone at the microphone in the front of the room. I was caught a bit off guard, but I still managed to sound out a few sentences about myself in Japanese and explain that I was happy to be there. When I first started to speak in Japanese, most of the teachers gasped. I worried that I had said something rude or had food on my face, but as it turns out, they were just shocked that I spoke Japanese (or at least tried). At first, this made me uncomfortable and I thought I would always feel like a visitor in their school, but when I went back for the second time this week, all of the teachers treated me as if I had been there every day this month instead of just once.

In my first class at Rou Gakkou, I found out that the students are not all completely deaf, so speaking to them is still sometimes an option. I usually work with an English teacher who is still in her first year at the school, and is full of enthusiasm and good ideas for our classes together. The first class had just one student, so after introducing myself, the three of us played piano and sang Beatles' songs together. After that, I was not so nervous about the rest of the day. I think the students at Rou Gakkou are very lucky, because their classes are so small that they get a lot of individual attention. Sometimes I feel less like I am teaching a class and more like I am just talking with the students. When I went back this week, I had class with more new students so I talked about myself and showed them pictures of my life at home.

My day at Rou Gakkou is different in many ways from a typical day at Tsu

Nishi or Tsu Shyogyo, so it adds some variety to my usual work schedule. Whereas I am teaching an essay-writing course to my students at Tsu Nishi and grading sentence outlines in my free periods, I am playing games with the students at Rou Gakkou and making a word search to see if they can find my name. At lunchtime, instead of eating a bento at my desk and talking with the students that come to see me, I sit with teachers and students to eat the cafeteria lunch at Rou Gakkou and have conversations on paper with students that want to tell me about their dreams and aspirations. The students at both schools are fun to teach and interested in getting to know me, but in very different ways—which makes life a lot more interesting!

One of the main reasons I was nervous to go to Rou Gakkou was the communication barrier. It is stressful enough struggling to understand students or teachers speaking in Japanese at my other schools, so I was not looking forward to the difficulties I would surely run into because I don't understand Japanese sign language. As is usually the case, I had no reason to worry because no one at Rou Gakkou expected me to communicate in sign language. Especially because many of the teachers aren't deaf, communication hasn't been a problem. Considering the fact that I have only been there two times, I have picked up a lot of sign language too—and I want to learn more!

When I first came to Japan, I was nervous to go to Rou Gakkou and I didn't know what to expect. Even after enjoying my first visit, I longed to stay at the schools and offices that are within a short bike ride of my home. Now that I have gone back again, I realize that I can be as much a part of life at there school as I want to. It sounds so clichéd, but life is really what you make of it, and I plan to spend the rest of the year enjoying the time I get to spend at Rou Gakkou, hopefully learning some Japanese sign language along the way too.