

Last week was graduation at Tsu Nishi, and although I was here for graduation last year, this was the first time that I had to watch students that I had actually taught graduate.

When I first came to Japan in 2004, I only taught second year students. It was hard at first, because I had no idea how to teach or really interact with high school kids. But the students in all my classes were patient with me; they listened carefully and tried their best in English classes. Sometimes I felt sorry for them because my classes were so serious, teaching them how to write a 5 paragraph essay rather than working on conversation or doing something fun. A lot of students didn't understand, and I'm pretty sure that most of them didn't have fun writing their essays. But they did their best! From April of last year, I started teaching my classes differently. Now we do more conversation activities so that the students can have fun using English with me. I sometimes wish that I would have had the chance to do exercises like this with the second years last year. But even without fun activities, they were such nice students. Now that I have taught more classes at different schools, I can appreciate how kind those students were to me when I first came to Japan. So even though I haven't taught them in their third year, when they were busy studying for university entrance exams, I'll miss them.

The other day, I was talking with a student who is going to a university for international studies in Kyoto. She told me that she wants to learn foreign languages so that she can go abroad and teach Japanese someday, like I teach English here. I was so proud and happy to hear that from her, even though she never mentioned it before. Even though I felt nervous about teaching and didn't think I was doing a good job when I went to her class last year, apparently she learned from me—that it's important to have an open mind and to be enthusiastic about going to new places and trying new things. This is so encouraging to me because it means that even students who aren't interested in English might be inspired or learn from me in different ways, too. I'm sad to see all of my first students leave Tsu Nishi, but at the same time I'm happy that they will all be going on to do bigger and better things.