

A few months ago, I spoke with my supervisor at school and explained to him that I wanted to get more involved at my school. Of course I teach English lessons and supervise the ESS Club, but my office is in a far corner of the school and I don't usually see a lot of students outside of class. I really wanted more ways to be involved with the students or teachers.

A few weeks later, a teacher at school suggested to me that I put music on the announcement system for the students at lunchtime. I learned that the broadcasting club did this most days, playing popular music and making announcements for the students as they eat their lunches. I had no idea that they did that, and I have been at my school for almost three years! Anyway, one day I went to the broadcasting club at lunchtime with a CD of current Billboard hits in America. I played the CD and talked with the nervous club members while they ate their lunches. It was awkward, but I was happy to have the opportunity.

The following week, I brought my own lunch to eat together with the students. I had a new CD and thought of a few things to say over the speaker together with the music. When I got to the broadcasting club room, the students were so much more at ease and friendly than the last week. That's when one of them said to me in Japanese, "N Sensei told us that you can understand pretty much any Japanese, right?" I had been exposed! I only ever speak to the students at my school in English, and while lots of them know that I understand some Japanese, I don't think they quite understood to what extent I can function in Japanese. The students were so relieved to know that they could communicate with me in Japanese, and they became a lot friendlier. After that week, we started to do a kind of interview before and after playing the music. The students ask me questions about myself or life in America and I answer in English. Then they repeat the answers in Japanese after the music. It's really great—something I couldn't do if I was just playing the music on my own.

Little by little, I have gotten to know the students in the broadcasting club better. They are really friendly, and eager to practice English even though they know I can understand Japanese. Of course the conversation often turns to Japanese, but they are still trying to speak English even though they don't have to. I'm relieved to know this. I've always been really strict about not speaking Japanese at school. But now I've learned that if I relax a bit, and let the students know that I can speak Japanese, it might make them more comfortable too.