

“L i v e I t ”

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Internationalisation is an enormous concept. The first encounter anyone has when dealing with the international arena is LANGUAGE. The world is changing rapidly and getting smaller. We are nearing the 21st century and attitudes towards education and knowledge of foreign languages is more demanding. My parents did not study a foreign language in their school days but now students are required to do a lot more. As a result, we expect higher qualifications and experience from co-workers.

I felt inadequate because I do not speak Japanese. I did not however feel any adverse attitudes from the Japanese because of my inability to speak their language. This is due to the fact that we have a much better education system than we had centuries ago. Our constant thirst for knowledge about foreign lifestyles, cultures, and business approaches makes us more tolerant and understanding of our fellow man.

I arrived in Japan August 1st as an AET. I was looking forward to teaching in Japan because I want to see the differences between the Australian and Japanese educational systems. Education has changed dramatically over the last 50 years in the information taught and the method in which it is taught.

One misunderstanding I've had about Japanese schools is that I thought Japanese students do not like school (like students in Australia) and have an extraordinary amount of homework. I have found that they do enjoy school and that they do have just as much homework as we do. Japanese students attend juku which we do not have. This system is new to me. Australian students can't wait for the end of the day to go home and play with their friends, go to their sports clubs, etc... Japanese students do these "free" activities at school.

Japanese customs were very new to me. The actual mannerisms, attitudes, ideas of the "people" were most contrary to my belief. The differences in socialising are also varied. When Japanese socialise at "enkais", there is usually a time limit of 2 hours. Socialising for me means being FREE- no time pressures, schedules, etc... The ritual of moving on to a second and third venue was exciting.

Holidays are different in different societies and so is the way people celebrate them. Christmas is the most important season in Australia.

Working through this season in Japan, and not really celebrating it was very strange. Observing religious practices is an intrinsic part of any culture.

This experience has made me appreciate my country. When living in ones own country one cannot evaluate it's culture, lifestyle, economy, educational system and traditions thoroughly without comparing it to other societies.

Studying about issues, particularly internationalisation, gives only a static view. The most effective method of learning is to actually be involved in the material you are learning about.

There is a difference in people I've met who have lived in a foreign country from those who have not. We seem to have experienced similar difficulties and feelings.

They are more open to diversity and differences simply because they have experienced them. I strongly believe in the value of education, but to truly understand a foreign way of life you must LIVE IT.

For example, Japanese New Year's rituals were a very different experience for me. I experienced a "typical" New Years's Eve. I ate soba, watched television with friends. At midnight I went to temple rang the huge bell (kane) and threw ¥5 into the osaisen bako and prayed for health and fortune in the new year. This was a totally different, almost spiritual experience that suited the time and place in which I was in – i.e. Japan. I am certain if I did this practice in Australia it would not feel so meaningful because we do not understand and appreciate the value of eating soba, going to temple etc..

We appreciate different things and practice different traditions. For example, Japanese celebrate New Year, westerners celebrate Christmas.

Respecting another culture is the first step towards understanding it. Trying to imitate a culture can cause confusion. It is refreshing for me being in Japan at this time, where you are adopting the concept of internationalisation. The presence of AET's in schools and the wider community is one of the major contributions to this task.

Learning through books is also an inital step towards inderstanding ourselves, our community, and humanity as a whole. "Living" these traditions and cultures gives an in depth look at the philosophies and reasonings behind why people do what they do.

We can learn from everyone and everything around us. Teaching is a profession that goes back to the beginning of time. Fathers showed their sons how to hunt and mothers showed their daughters how to prepare wheat/food.

I am constantly learning from my students (and they from me hopefully). Observing is an important technique to acquire.

Being a foreigner, I know I am "observed" even though I do not consciously intend to be.

To learn is to listen to and observe not only the material presented to you but to recognise the subtleties in people and things and try to understand the community in which you live in and the community at large.