

Editor's Letter

When educator Ernest Boyer proposed his human commonalities, eight universal cultural concepts shared by people throughout the world, one idea was that we all develop and need forms of social bonding. I was reminded of this every day this summer while in Japan as one of 160 teachers from around the United States in the Japan Fulbright Memorial Fund Teacher Program (JFMF), an educational and professional development program funded by the Japanese government.

The JFMF program is intended to provide participants with an overview of Japan's educational system, culture, and people through a three-week immersion program. A primary purpose of the program is to express Japan's commitment to better understanding and developing friendship between our two nations.

We were provided much information about Japan's group-oriented society and asked to "curb our enthusiasm as independent-minded, energetic Americans" and to be mindful of developing respectful relationships with the members of groups of JFMF teachers, and with our Japanese hosts. I believe the positive nature of our individual experiences was dependent on the relationships we developed and our willingness to embrace our responsibilities to the groups with which we interacted.

After we arrived in Tokyo, our entire group met daily for a week for orientation and to prepare us for our time outside the city. Our group of sixteen (pictured above) was assigned to Ichinoseki, Iwate, as our host city. Here, we traveled for over a week, spending entire days at a university, a high school, a junior high, and an elementary school. Though the region had just experienced a major earthquake, we were warmly welcomed everywhere we went.

By far the highlight of our Ichinoseki experience was our stay with a host family. Though most of us admitted some level of anxiety leading up to our weekend with our Japanese hosts, to me it was the most valuable experience we had. It gave us the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships outside our usual comfort zones and to experience firsthand the life of a Japanese family.

The entire JFMF experience further validated my belief that art teachers, because of the visual expression art offers, are in the best position to help students understand the commonalities all peoples share and the delightful expressions, forms, and idiosyncrasies in which they differ.



Nancy and the other members of the June 2008 JFMF Iwate team with Yuko Numakura, the principal of Hagisho Elementary School in Ichinoseki, Iwate, Japan.

Nancy Walkup