

**Jon Coller
(1999~2002)**

I first taught English in Japan from 1985 to 1987. Between then and the time of my arrival at LIOJ in March 1999, I studied at both under-graduate and post-graduate level, as well as teaching for several years in Australia and South Korea. I stayed at LIOJ for just over three years, initially as a full-time teacher, and later as the program developer.

What had attracted me to LIOJ was the opportunity to put to use, the range of experience I had, teaching students from young learners to adults. In this respect LIOJ is quite unique, and offers a rare mixture of teaching environments. During my time there, I participated in the planning and delivery of classes in the Community Program, (kindergarten and elementary school children, junior and senior high school students, and adults of all ages), as well as special programs (business people and high school students undertaking intensive residential programs, although not simultaneously), and the International Summer Workshop for Teachers of English.

Being involved in all aspects of such a wide range of classes was, without doubt, a huge challenge, but one that had more than its share of rewards. As a teacher, I feel that I developed skills and techniques, both in and out of the classroom, which will be with me for the rest of my professional life. As program developer, I was able to put into practice, many of the theories I had learnt whilst studying Educational Administration, as well as some of my own ideas about how teachers and students should be treated, and should treat each other. As with all things in life, there were both successes and failures along the way, but, for me at least, it was an amazing experience, and I hope that those people I worked with, who supported my efforts and taught me so much, will also look back on those times and feel that, together we really did achieve a lot. I worked alongside some very impressive individuals during my time at LIOJ, and the feeling of satisfaction I experienced, especially when we worked as a team on programs like the High School Intensives, is something for which I am grateful to them all.

The highlight of each academic year for me was always the annual Summer Workshop. Some of my favourite memories of LIOJ are from International Night, held mid-way through the program. I was always immensely impressed by the incredible level of interest in each other's cultures and personal experience displayed by the participants, international scholars, presenters, and guests from within the local Odawara community. This serious enthusiasm was, without fail, nicely balanced by a great collective sense of humour and appreciation of the bizarre during the entertainment section of the evening, which, by some twist of logic, I always seemed to wind up MC-ing! Who could ever forget the ode to LIOJ recited by a Malaysian scholar in Muslim prayer mode, or the Japanese participant who performed an impressive belly dance? Not to mention "Waltzing Matilda," performed (or murdered) by a multi-national choir, hell-bent on serving up half a dozen different variations of the song simultaneously.

Finally, having worked in other office cultures in Japan, I would like to say that it was something of a surprise to find how well both the international and local staff worked together at LIOJ. A healthy mutual respect for cultural and philosophical differences exists, and during my time there, everyone was always willing to make concessions when, for one reason or another, we didn't completely see eye to eye. The positive

spin-offs from such a situation are many-fold, but most noticeably, it helped to maintain a happy, positive work environment.

Having left LIOJ to return to Australia only a month ago, these memories are still very fresh in my mind. I suspect, however, that they will stay with me for quite some time.