

## Greetings from the President's Office

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### Children's Cross-Cultural Interaction

Since the establishment of AIU, one of our goals has been to promote cross-cultural interaction in order to deepen understanding and exchange with the world, while remaining based in Akita. Our students, including international exchange students, and even with their busy schedules, are constantly engaging in outreach activities at elementary and junior high schools. The number of these activities exceeds more than 220 every year.

It was more than 30 years ago when I helped the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan's project that invited 30 elementary and junior high school students from Japan to a trip to Georgia and Louisiana in the US to visit local municipalities and schools during the summer vacations. I had assisted this project for three years as an instructor.

It was just a 10-day program, but it must have been the first experience for the participations to be away from their parents and on such a long journey abroad, and perhaps a sleepless night before departure from Narita Airport.

While in the US, our delegation traveled in a long-haul bus and travelled a great distance, about hundreds of kilometers a day. What I did was to prepare a few sentences of greetings and self-instruction in English for each student, and included the katakana letters as a guide on how to pronounce the words for those who were not familiar with English.

We naturally all became close during our trip abroad. The students truly committed to practicing English and managed to pronounce the words smoothly. Our conversations became lively, but sometimes we could not understand each other because the children from the Tohoku and Kyushu region had unique dialects or pronunciations that were difficult to understand.

What I remembered vividly is a conversation among the children from the Tohoku region, including Akita. "I need to help my parents in getting abalone when I get back to home." "I will be busy milking my cows every morning." They were already playing a crucial role as an important worker in their family. The scenery outside the vehicle spread across the enormous plains in the southern US, and I came to feel like I needed to fully support my students, who were already respectable workers in their own right, in order for them to make themselves understood in English.

These elementary and junior high school students were not raised in a city. Rather, most of their parents were farmers growing corn, wheat, or raising cattle. They rode on large combine harvesters with adults and worked on hundreds of hectares of farms and ranches, and even drove big tractors. Some even operated hundreds of milk machines.

Agriculture and raising cattle at that time changed in Japan to the US way. As an interpreter, my role was to translate questions and answers by students and explain the differences, even though the jobs seemed similar. An unusual feeling arose while communicating with the children. To see them discussing about their job duties and responsibilities without hesitation made them appear unpretentious but also confident.

These kids must be over 40 years old by now. I am wondering how their experiences at that time have affected the rest of their lives. I am very curious about how they have grown.



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<http://www.asahi.com/area/akita/articles/MTW20190611051550001.html>

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