I interned at the Ishikawa Educational Center during the summer before my Junior year. There had not been an intern there in recent years so I did not know what to expect, but I applied because I had a curiosity about education as well as a desire to improve my Japanese.

The Ishikawa Educational Center is the professional development resource center for all Ishikawa public school teachers from pre-school to high school including special education. It has many classrooms for seminars, practical workshops and mock classes, a large hall for lectures and physical education training, fully equipped science rooms, and a large classroom for food-preparation training for nutritional managers (栄養師) who take care of Japanese elementary schools' delicious school lunches. In addition to providing training, the center offers the opportunity for teachers to view and borrow resources from a newly opened library containing DVDs and VHSs of recognized teachers conducting lessons, textbooks of all subjects, specialized periodicals, and the current standard curriculum published by the 文部科学省 (MEXT).

My internship consisted of a rotation through the three sections of the center: Training, Planning/Research, and Consulting. Since the people who work at the center are originally schoolteachers who were appointed to their current positions by the prefecture, everyone conducts seminars as well as fulfills their various roles in the different sections. From my first day until my last, no matter which section I was in, I had two kinds of responsibilities. First, as a helper to the teachers at the center I worked at reception and directed trainees to their sessions, set up and cleaned up materials after training sessions, and prepared documents for distribution to the prefectural schools or to attendees of training sessions. Second, as a student of Japanese and of Japanese education I also attended the training sessions for a large variety of subjects: Biology, English, Food Preparation, School Nurse Training, preschool P.E, methods for developing students with Autism for independent life, educational regulations and bullying, to name a few. Towards the beginning of the internship there was not a lot happening at the center so I spent time exploring the resource library. However, in the last two weeks I attended training and helped behind the scenes all day every day. At the beginning I would often ask teachers what I should do next but by the end I knew the daily procedure well enough to go about my work without any consultation.

Two completely different facets to the internship were regular visits to middle and high school English classes at two local schools and special one-time visits to a recently built elementary school and a special education school. During these visits I observed Japanese education from perspectives not available at the center. For
example, in my regular visits to English classes I saw the daily act of teaching from both the student and teacher's perspectives. I was not allowed to teach students but as an "adult" in the room I experienced the feeling of thirty pairs of young eyes on me when I introduced myself and chanted "good morning" in the class routine. I was also able to move about the room to look at the kids' work and sometimes be partners with them in dialogues when there were an odd number of students. In the staff room I got to experience the daily life of a foreign ALT (Assistant Language Teacher) in a Japanese school. ALTs come to Japan on the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Program to provide native speaker assistance in English classes. There were small teams of them at the schools I visited and we chatted about many things. Although English had more of a presence during these days than I thought they should for effective immersion into Japanese, switching between English and Japanese all the time actually improved the transition speed of my bilingualism.

I applied to the educational center internship because of an interest in education but I thought it would primarily be an opportunity to learn Japanese workplace language and etiquette and get to know the locality better since I would not be holed up studying kanji this year. But it turned out to be much more than that, inspiring me to seriously consider a career in education and deepening my awareness of what being an educator is. The teachers I met at the center were very wonderful people who I respect and admire for their devotion to their work, ever-positive attitude, and sincere kindness towards their American college student intern. My boss asked me to return to the center someday during spring, the center's prettiest season because of its cherry tree grove, and I hope to very much.

Students at 石川特別支援学校 being briefed at the end of baking lesson and myself collecting a flower from the center garden to extract pigment for a science training class. The delicious items baked at the class bakery above are sold to faculty, staff and visitors.