

Good morning, everyone.

Today is my last day at this school.

Almost five years ago, I came to Japan for the first time. I was excited... but I was also nervous. I didn't know how to live here. I didn't know how this school worked. My apartment was almost empty. But I very quickly discovered that I wasn't alone. From my very first days here, so many people helped me. They took me furniture shopping so that my apartment could begin to feel like a home. They helped me open bank accounts. They patiently explained the customs and routines that aren't written in a handbook. They encouraged me whenever I felt frustrated, confused, or overwhelmed. I don't think I have ever thanked all of you enough. お世話になりました。

When I first came here, I thought I was coming to teach English.

Instead, I found myself learning every day.

My Japanese is still far from perfect. Many of you worried that your English wasn't good enough. But over these five years, I learned something important.

Real communication is not an exam.

If somebody doesn't understand, the conversation doesn't end.

Usually they simply smile, and say,

*"Could you explain that another way?"*

So please don't be afraid to use your English.

Don't be afraid to make mistakes.

We don't have to speak perfectly.

Trying is always more important than being perfect.

We have only to keep trying to understand each other.

英語はテストのためだけのものではありません。人と人をつなぐためのものです。

Some of my happiest memories are very small ones.

Every April, during my self-introduction, I showed you my favourite music, games, films and anime.

Every year, one or two of you would suddenly light up because you recognised one.

Those moments always made me smile.

And maybe some of you will remember me for suddenly bursting into song...

...or for speaking with a very loud voice...

...or for having perhaps a few too many friendly debates.

I hope you also remember that it's okay to be enthusiastic.

It's okay to care about things.

Every year, after graduation, I would go home carrying letters, messages, and drawings from students. Many of you found words on paper that were difficult to say out loud.

その手紙は今でも全部大切にしています。

Before I became an English teacher, I was a physics researcher.

When I was thirty years old, I decided to change my career.

It was a little frightening, but I am very glad that I did, because it brought me here.

So I hope you remember this:

Yes, the choices you make now *are* important.

But they also do not have to define the rest of your life.

One decision leads to another. One door opens another.

Keep learning. Stay curious.

Don't be afraid to choose a different path if your heart tells you to.

People often talk about how different countries are.

After living in Britain, Germany, and Japan, I think I can say something with confidence.

People are people.

Wherever we are born...

...whatever language we speak...

...we all laugh. We all worry. We all hope.

And we all want to be understood.

Finally...

I wish I had found more opportunities to talk with each of you individually.

But I will always be grateful for the conversations we *did* have.

Before I realised it...

this school no longer felt like just my workplace.

この学校は、私にとってただの「働く場所」ではなく、「帰ってくる場所」になりました。

Thank you for welcoming me into your school...

...into your classrooms...

...and into your lives.

I will never forget my time here, nor will I forget any of you.

本当にありがとうございました。

またどこかで会えますように。

Goodbye. 😊