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## Japanese teacher brings perspective from South American childhood

TIS teacher Masami Maruki smiles as she talks about challenging her students. "I set very high expectations for my students. At the beginning of a new lesson, I share my vision with them. I help them see what we're going to do and what we're going to learn. Then they have the energy to finish, and they have a big sense of accomplishment. I believe that anything becomes possible for my students, and I think it is because they are open-minded and natural inquirers."

Masami Sensei is Japanese but spent the first five years of her life in Peru. She then lived in Brazil from age five to ten, and later returned to Peru for high school. Living abroad helped Masami understand the importance of appreciating diversity. "When I lived in Brazil, I made friends in my neighborhood and learned Portuguese from them. Then I went to a Japanese school, and a girl there made fun of me. She said I could only be her friend if I didn't speak Portuguese and didn't play with the local kids. So I stopped being a Brazilian, and then gained a brand new identity, to be Japanese. My best Brazilian friend cried for many days, but I only learned that many years later.

"Now that I live in a diverse country like the U.S. and because of what I have gone through in the past, I have

come to understand how knowing another language can open up the possibility of meeting new people. Learning languages also gives you freedom to search for and choose your identity, and more importantly, teaches you sensitivity to the people around you."

Masami's upbringing also influenced her desire to teach. "In Peru, I saw a lot of children without enough food, without good schools, without any real support in their lives. From that time, I learned that I wanted to work with underprivileged children. I did that as a volunteer in Peru. Now I am so grateful to be at TIS. I want my students to appreciate learning and to feel that learning is fun.

"Students have big questions. They seek something that is so meaningful to them. I try to teach problem solving skills so they will be able to find their answers and connect what we do in class to the outside world."

Now a fourth year TIS teacher, Masami Sensei clearly enjoys her second and third grade students. "My favorite subject to teach is math," she says with a twinkle in her eye. "Math is so fascinating because it starts with imagination. It's so much fun to learn how each child thinks differently about a math problem. The students first imagine the problem, each in his or her



own way. That's how they understand it. Then they work through the numbers and abstract formations and come up with the answer."

The parents of Masami's students see the impact she makes. In this year's school-wide survey one parent wrote, "Masami is an amazing, creative and driven teacher who continues to draw out learning from our children in a number of ways. She is growing children who are proud of their efforts and learning to learn. We will see her influence in our child's ability to learn and embrace problem solving and critical thinking into adulthood. You can't ask for more than that!"