Twenty-First Australia-Japan Relations Essay Contest 2003 Junior B Division

Forging Friendship… Forever…

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“Suppose that your school has had a Sister School in Japan for 10 years but very little has been done to promote the relationship over that time. Suggest why the Sister School relationship was forgotten about for so long and plan a way for your school to revive and strengthen the friendship. Identify how you plan to stop the relationship from being forgotten again.”

‘…Japan and Australia have different landscapes and histories, but we share values and interests that provide the basis for our cooperation. We are friends, and I believe we should be even better friends…’

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi.

Effective communication is a fundamental component underlying all successful relationships. Over the past 10 years, the Sister School Relationship between my school and Seiryo High School in Japan has been steadily declining.

Whilst it must be stated that all relationships have a dual component, I can only be specific from an Australian perspective. It may be safe to generalise however, that many of the causes of the declining relationship identified may be common to both schools.

Although Japan is some 7155 kilometres distance from Australia (John, A.B. 1997), geographical distance alone cannot be the only cause of the ebbing union. Other potential reasons for this breakdown in communication must lie in the students themselves.

In the second year of high school at Cannon Hill Anglican College Languages Other Than English (L.O.T.E) become an elective rather than a compulsory subject. Those students who do take on the commitment of learning a
L.O.T.E. are generally highly motivated and involve themselves in a broad range of academic as well as non-curricular activities. The strain of the workload, homework and optional pursuits such as the Sister School Program, Active Citizen Group and the Community Development Program may result in poor time management and, ultimately, students’ inability to maintain an involvement to such a high degree. As a result, frequent communication with our Sister School may be one of the areas that decline. When the Sister School Relationship was established, the teachers responsible for the program had many goals and ambitions and during the first few years, many of these were met. However, over the past few years these teachers have moved on - undoubtedly creating Sister School Relationships in their new placements; but their leaving created a lack of leadership and inspiration for our students. Further, at its inception, the Sister School Program sought and was given sponsorship by local businesses and companies in the area. These sponsorships were granted for a period of one year but, unfortunately, were not renewed at the end of that period. This resulted in a dramatic decrease of funds that were geared specifically to ensure the ongoing growth of the program.

A major consequence of diminished funding was the depletion of resources in the Learning Centre. Initially, this Centre was the main focus of cultural learning. A once vibrant and exciting teaching and learning area, the Centre became somewhat underutilised and certainly under resourced. In turn, this produced further lack of motivation and student interest. This lead to students showing little motivation in pursuing the Sister School Program and other related activities.

Despite the diminished relationship in previous years, with renewed commitment, enthusiastic and highly motivated staff and students, this situation can be rectified.

How do we begin?
As with all successful joint enterprises an action plan is essential.

Firstly, it should be made clear what the plan aims to achieve in the short, medium and long term. The short-term goal is to re-establish contact and further develop the Sister School Relationship. This could be done initially by holding a ‘Special Events Day’ (SED) to relaunch the project. The object of the ‘SED’ would be to raise school and community awareness and rekindle interest in the program. To ensure success, publicising the day is essential. Publicity would take the form of, at a school-based level, creating posters advertising the day and its events. To involve the wider community, contact would be made with local radio and television stations (particularly those radio stations who have Sister Radio Stations (DFAT, Aug. 2003) in Japan), local business groups and Brisbane-based Japanese dignitaries from the Consulate General of Japan.

A ‘SED’ would also be held simultaneously with our Sister School, Seiryo High School who would invite similar Australian dignitaries. The day would comprise fun and learning and events would include competitions such as ‘create a shared logo’. The successful logo would later be used by both schools on newsletters, school correspondence and, ultimately be integrated into school uniforms at both schools.

Quizzes would be conducted in Japanese at our school and in English at our Sister School. Cultural activities specific to Japan would be demonstrated and include such things as (at the Australian school) origami, calligraphy, bonsai, kendo (Margaret, 2002: 61) and some Japanese cooking (Margaret, 2002: 111). Similar cultural events such as Aboriginal art, boomerang throwing, cricket and an Australian style barbeque would occur at the Sister School.

The day would culminate with a live video conference between representatives from both schools and an official launch of the new program. The medium and long-term goals would be fundamentally to maintain interest and further develop the program so that the friendship would not be forgotten.
To accomplish this, following the ‘SED’, a motivated group of students, staff and community members would form a committee and be responsible for making plans for future cultural exchange days. The committee would work closely with a similar group from Seiryo High School to coordinate these plans and share ideas.

Regular contact would be made via email and airmail. A pen-pal system would be introduced so that individual students could communicate on a personal level. This could be taken a step further with family involvement, where parents of students also made contact with the parents of the Sister School. Monthly video conferences could also be arranged between schools and a weekly chat room established. To ensure that the relationship continues to thrive and develop, younger students at the school would be invited to attend occasional sessions when pen pal groups are having a video conference or are ‘online’ in a chat room. This would create interest and enthusiasm so that when these students reach the upper school, they too can become actively involved.

Enough community interest would be generated from the reopening day to gain sponsorship from local companies - these companies would also establish ties with Japanese companies and continue to promote interest in the program both here and in the local area of our Sister School.

Biannual exchange trips could become part of the program paid for, in part, from fundraising. Fundraising would be achieved through ‘SED’, where, for an appropriate fee, members of the public would be invited to such things as a Japanese film night, Japanese trivia night and even Japanese cooking and bonsai classes. A regular segment would be arranged with local radio to promote the Sister School activities. The ‘Cultural Days’ would be advertised on radio to ensure maximum coverage of upcoming events.

With the support of the school, parents, local businesses and media, the Sister School Program will flourish. As Mr. Koizumi, the Prime Minister of Japan, once said,
‘…We are friends and I believe we should be even better friends…’ (DFAT, September 2003).

The implementation of this plan will ensure that CHAC and Seiryo High School become and will always be the best of friends.
Bibliography


