

Japanese University Students and Global Peace-Building Conferences: The Development of English Language Skills

Craig Smith

The Ministry of Education, and many universities, have introduced schemes which are intended to prepare Japanese university students to play creative roles in the numerous and diverse global communities that have come together to make the world a just place for more people. The relentless decline in the numbers of Japanese university students going abroad for academic study purposes has so far resisted innovative and generous efforts to reverse this worrying trend. International comparisons of English-language skills seldom bring educators here the good news they are hoping to see. However, at the same time, there is abundant evidence that Japanese students compare very favourably with their counterparts in other nations in measures of achievement in fundamental literacy and numeracy skills, advanced knowledge of science, and creative problem-solving capabilities. Perhaps most importantly, the youth sector of the population plays a considerable, often unheralded, role in making Japan one of the most peaceful and stable nations on earth. How can we, as college English teachers, take advantage of the potential of these strengths to deal with the challenges in helping our students find ways they can usefully contribute to the global community? Participation in international student conferences on our campuses may foster English communicative competence for peace and friendship. Co-curricular peace-building conferences held on our campuses can be transformative educational experiences because of the clarity and coherence of the sense of purpose that intense analytical engagement in the discussion and debate of issues, which are relevant to the well-being of the world's people, brings to English language study. Links can be forged between language and communication studies and a host of other courses in international relations, regional studies, international business management, agricultural, health care, law and engineering. Friendships formed among conference colleagues, destined to last a lifetime, will serve the interests of peace.