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Seigakuin Incoming Freshman Orientation and Study Program

English Fun Day

Brian Byrd

As a part of this year's incoming freshmen study orientation, an "English Fun Day" was scheduled to allow students to enjoy an experience of English and culture quite different from the grammar-based lectures common in high schools. Three teachers from Seigakuin University General Research Institute who specialize in teaching English to young learners took as their task the introducing of activities in which students of all English levels and backgrounds could participate together—and touch both foreign cultures and the culture of Japan in a new way. The teachers also hoped that the element of fun—songs, stories, games, and interviews—would contribute to an atmosphere in which students could relax and become better acquainted with each other, and so begin the friendships key to well-being and success in university.

Taking Saint Patrick's Day, the internationally celebrated Irish holiday (March 17) as a theme, and drawing on the legends and lore of the lush green island, the room was decorated before the students arrived with shamrocks, leprechauns, and a "Happy Saint Patrick's Day" banner. The students then entered the classroom to the familiar, mystical strains of Irish hit singer Enya, and to allow more interaction, sat down around tables in groups of five or six. Wanting to warm up the students' seldom-used English speaking muscles, we began by involving all the students in singing simple greeting songs like "How are you? Fine, thank you" and "How is the weather? It is sunny." We then performed a short skit with props, reenacting a popular Irish legend, again with audience participation.

In groups of twenty, the students then rotated

through each of the three teacher's rooms, participating enthusiastically in the activities introduced. In a "How romantic are you?" quiz interview, they asked each other a set of questions, touching on this close-to-heart subject in a humorous, non-threatening way. In the other two rooms, they learned hands-on how to introduce aspects of Japanese culture and customs using simple, rhythmic English. Topics included "Teaching how to use chopsticks and proper chopstick manner" (with actual chopsticks and easy to remember chanted or sung instructions), and the familiar, traditional Japanese story *Momotaro* (Peach Boy), taught using *kamishibai* and a *karuta* card game.

Refreshments were served—green cider or tea, and green-colored snacks of various kinds in keeping with the Irish Saint Patrick's Day theme. In the group time together at the end, students learned and sang America's second most familiar song (after the national anthem), "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." The melody is familiar in Japan, as American Major League Baseball is shown regularly on Japanese television. With baseball season starting soon, students might have a chance to hear again the lyrics to the catchy song. We concluded with number bingo, but with the hints for each number given in the form of math problems. Green pens and Irish badges were given as bingo prizes; motivation was high.

Students, some of who entered the room in the morning looking shy and hesitant, left with smiles, and the friendly, relaxed atmosphere reportedly carried over into the computer class later that afternoon. Although only a few of the nearly sixty students raised their hands when asked if they

liked English at the first morning session, the survey done at the end was extremely positive, and students' comments indicated that this approach to English had been a valuable—and fun—learning and socializing experience. Gauging from this response, “fun” English days of a similar nature should be a part of future orientations.

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