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New Zealand and Japanese high schools share Home Room classes in online experience

New Zealand high school students are having conversations in Japanese with students at high schools in Tokyo, thanks to an initiative from the North Asia Centre of Asia-Pacific Excellence (NA CAPE) in collaboration with Education New Zealand (ENZ).

This international language-exchange pilot programme is also giving Japanese students opportunities to practise their English and learn more about New Zealand. This activity builds on a Memorandum of Understanding between Education New Zealand and Waseda University in Japan.

Last week Japanese teachers from Auckland's Liston College and Papatoetoe High School connected with nine teachers from Waseda University, Waseda Jitsugyo School and Waseda Saga Junior and Senior High School over four one-hour home room sessions, sharing digital experiences and their interests in each other's countries and cultures.

The exchange comes at a time when Japan has lifted its covid-19 state of national emergency. Many high schools in Japan have remained closed since late February, causing both teachers and parents to worry that students may be falling behind academically. Online exchanges with New Zealand classrooms can help the Japanese students catch up and excel.

Making the shift to digital teaching has been a multi-faceted challenge for Japanese and New Zealand teachers alike. This forum is allowing teachers to overcome digital hurdles together.

Connecting students between New Zealand and Japan using video conferencing provides a welcome opportunity for language students to share their cultures, practise speaking and listening, and acts as the first step in establishing ties between schools.

Japanese teacher at Papatoetoe High School, Hema Hebhana, commented: "All classroom activities are focused on preparing students to communicate with Japanese speakers in an authentic way. The language exchange allowed them to try speaking in their own classroom. It was extremely motivating for the Kiwi students and they look forward to similar sessions. This is especially important at this time, as it may be a while until we can actually visit Japan."

In the absence of foreign visits, connecting students across cultures through new digital methods is more important than ever. Director of the ENZ Tokyo office, Misa Kitaoka, says: "As we continue to build the New Zealand-Japan education relationship, it's been very inspiring to see the online community growing in connecting Japanese and Kiwi schools. Alongside the NA CAPE and New Zealand schools, we look forward to further promoting the online exchange by sharing Japanese language and culture with Kiwi students and teachers."

Following on from the success of this international language exchange, the NA CAPE plans to support additional sessions, and connect New Zealand high school language students and their teachers with their colleagues in Korea and China.

The NA CAPE is committed to building New Zealanders' capacity to engage with the countries of North Asia. Find out more about the NA CAPE at www.northasiacape.org.nz

Education New Zealand (ENZ) is New Zealand's government agency, promoting New Zealand as a study destination and supporting the delivery of education services offshore. Find out more about ENZ at <https://enz.govt.nz/>

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