

Title of Session: Benkyoukai-Starting a Japanese Program from Scratch

Moderator: Keiko Schneider

Guest Speaker: Karen Christianson

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KeikoSc: WELCOME TO BENKYOUKAI

KeikoSc claps loudly

KeikoSc: Today we have a guest speaker, Karen sensei from Canada.

KeikoSc: She is going to give up tips to create language program (in her case Japanese)

KeikoSc: First I would like to ask Karen sensei to introduce herself.

KeikoSc: Then everybody does.

KeikoSc: And Karen sensei will go on with her presentation.

KeikoSc: yoroshii deshouka.

KeikoSc looks around

EmiA: Hai.

KeikoSc: dewa Karen sensei...

KeikoSc bows

KarenCh: Well, I thought I was an ESL teacher and maybe a French teacher...

KarenCh: but then I became a Japanese teacher

KeikoSc smiles

KarenCh: working in western Canada now

KarenCh: douzo ..

KeikoSc: I am Keiko Schneider, organizer of the benkyoukai.

KeikoSc: Japanese teacher wanna-be

EmiA: Emi from Arizona. Teach Japanese at a community college.

KeikoSc: dewa onegai shimasu.

KeikoSc bows

KarenCh: Well, I hesitate to say that my program is a "done-deal" because in many ways I am still starting

KarenCh: Every day is still part of the building process

KarenCh: Maybe that is never over

KarenCh: Since it's still a new-ish idea in my school and my district, and I don't have an on-going contract, I can't take anything for granted from year-to-year

KarenCh: I had a conversation with the principal today about next year

KeikoSc growls

KarenCh: How many classes? What levels can we offer?

KarenCh: It's still very up-in-the-air

KarenCh: It looks like we will continue to offer the first 2 levels, but after that it's really going to be a struggle

KarenCh: The principal says she can't see Japanese "replacing" French at the senior levels

KarenCh: French is still our other official language in Canada, and we are a small school

KarenCh: Japanese is kind of a novelty

KarenCh: {any questions so far?}

EmiA: Yes.

KeikoSc: ochiai sensei ,please

KeikoSc: This is a small group here.

KeikoSc smiles

EmiA: Those who quit taking Japanese after Grade 9, where have they gone..taking another foreign language?

KarenCh: hmmm ... I'm not sure

KarenCh: they might not be taking any other language

EmiA: Since taking a language is not required...

KarenCh: if they take another language, they have to start at the grade 9 level, so it means "back-tracking" a bit if they change languages

KeikoSc raises her hand.

KarenCh: yes, Keiko sensei?

KeikoSc: I wanted to ask you about the principal and language learning climate in Canada.

KarenCh: yes?

KeikoSc: I suspect it is more popular, needed?

KeikoSc: Canadians have better concept of benefits of learning foreign languages?

KeikoSc . o O (than US...)

KarenCh: I don't know if I'm familiar with American attitudes on that topic but ...

MikaW joined the room.

KeikoSc: Welcome Mika sensei.

KeikoSc: We are just starting the discussion

KarenCh: we do have two official languages, and in several grades of schooling taking French is required

KeikoSc: Would you like to intro yourself? We are small group here.

KeikoSc: Particularly I was interested in principal's stance for learning foreign languages.

KarenCh: We have received a new principal in the last few months and she seems very supportive of my efforts, which is very nice

KarenCh: she is happy to have offerings in 3 languages in our school: French, Spanish and Japanese, now

KarenCh: it's a good point for a smaller school

KarenCh: there are so many options which we cannot offer, so it's good that we have languages

KarenCh: grade 11 of a foreign language is required to enter a BC university

KeikoSc nods

KarenCh: so if our students want to go to post-secondary ...

KarenCh: they need a language

KeikoSc: I see

KeikoSc looks at Ochiai sensei

KeikoSc: So who are students who want to study Japanese?

KeikoSc: Are they a little "different"?

KarenCh: I don't think so

KarenCh: they seem to come from across the school population

EmiA: Any benefit to learn Japanese?

KarenCh: nothing specific; just that it's an elective, and it satisfies a language requirement

MikaW: do they have a special interest in Japanese culture? such as Anime, manga...

KarenCh: yes, some of them are anime nuts, or manga addicts before they come to me

EmiA: How about job-wise in the community?

MikaW: oh, there are many students in my class!! they do not like to speak Japanese.

KarenCh: I'm hoping that in a year or two, some of my graduates will get jobs at the tourist information centre or the wildlife centre or other places where they meet overseas visitors and they will really be able to make use of these skills!

KarenCh: right now they're only in grade 9

KeikoSc nods gracefully

EmiA: So, you need to work on their parents!

KarenCh: Next week we have a volunteer intern coming to Creston

KarenCh: we were planning today "what do we know how to say to Her?"

KarenCh: so they were planning their basic self-introduction phrases

KeikoSc: In the paper, you obviously mention the challenge of teaching resources...

KarenCh: and the lack of them ...

KeikoSc: being a small community of no Japanese restaurant!!

KeikoSc: It is obviously a challenge.

KarenCh: oh, I wish I could have a field trip to a restaurant!

KeikoSc: Any more comment on that?

KarenCh: We have to make our own fun in a small town?

MikaW: how about cooking Japanese food at your school?

KarenCh: yes, that's what we do

EmiA: And invite parents!

KarenCh: I have to make deals with the cooking teachers to borrow their room

KarenCh: yes, we should invite parents too

KarenCh: what a good idea!

EmiA: Does U of BC have a Japanese program?

KarenCh: yes, they do. I think quite a large Asian studies department

KarenCh: I visited a Japanese garden on the campus last summer

EmiA: I wonder if you could somehow inform their parents about the program of UBC???

KeikoSc . o O (smart idea)

KeikoSc: Reach above and reach below

KarenCh: I think that those who would possibly continue in their Japanese studies know that those possibilities are there at UBC

KarenCh: It's a very large university (60,000 or so students)

KarenCh: when I have more than a one-quarter time position, I will work on field trips to Vancouver

KarenCh: then we can visit restaurants, university, etc

KeikoSc: Mika sensei, did you have any more questions?

KeikoSc . o O (.125)

KeikoSc: Karen sensei...

KeikoSc: What are your tips, what did you do right and what did you do wrong?

KarenCh: hai ...

KeikoSc: Or what else other than field trip would you like to do in the future in order to promote the program?

KarenCh: hmmm... well today was the end of an academic term, so naturally a time to reflect a little bit

KeikoSc listens

KarenCh: and I felt I have been getting bogged down in the details a bit

MikaW: my connection is somehow not good. there are huge delay to display..sorry...

KeikoSc: Teaching is full of details.

KarenCh: the new intern arrives this week-end, and I want to rejuvenate things again

KeikoSc: Don't worry Mika sensei.

KeikoSc: If you have questions, please shoot away

KarenCh: I have about 8 weeks of classes and I want to shoot for some big, fun stuff

KeikoSc: that's right, interns

KarenCh: It's difficult to keep up the energy with such a small fraction of a part-time position (I find) because I have to work at other school too

KeikoSc nods profoundly

KarenCh: It makes me fragmented

KarenCh: so it's just a good time for me to re-focus, I think

EmiA: I admire your effort.

KeikoSc: Me, too

MikaW: me, too

KeikoSc: It is a passion.

KarenCh: thank you very much

KarenCh: that's high praise, from this group

EmiA: I hope you will receive a fund from somewhere.

KarenCh: There was an idea from a previous benkyoukai ...

KeikoSc listens

KarenCh: about making posters, and making up cheers, for athletic events at school, in Japanese of course

KarenCh: some of my students want to try it

KeikoSc . o O (ah, Rushton sensei's?)

KarenCh: nobody else will understand, but it doesn't matter. It just shows we have spirit

KarenCh: yes, I think it might have been Rushton sensei.

KeikoSc smiles. He was hilarious. They are cheering like "where is the bathroom?"

KarenCh: Yes, and "I like goats!"

KeikoSc chuckles

KarenCh: If we are cheering material from Kimono ch 6, then we are practicing for our test, too

KeikoSc: Good idea!

EmiA: What do you think the biggest issue to prevent your program from growing?

KeikoSc: obstacles, you mean, sensei?

EmiA: Yes.

KarenCh: wow. what a good question.

KarenCh: size of the school? academic requirements? number of blocks in the day?

KarenCh: staff dollars?

KarenCh: you've really got me thinking now

KeikoSc: . o O (I was going to ask for her wish list)

KarenCh: maybe it's my energy level that is the limiting factor

KarenCh: I bet if I did more, I would have more students

EmiA: I feel a lot of your energy..

KeikoSc: well, sensei, it is good if only you are not blaming yourself not doing enough.

KarenCh: and I have a husband and a couple of children too, so I do put some limits on it but all the same ...

KeikoSc: maybe we should come up with more ideas of using students as troops

KeikoSc: . o O (to help the program)

KarenCh: that sounds good!

KeikoSc looks around

KarenCh: My own son is away this year on a foreign exchange, and I am hosting a Japanese student so I am even trying at HOME to build a Japanese program!

KeikoSc: WOW

KarenCh: (don't worry! It's not that serious!)

KeikoSc: Oh, we are almost at the end of the discussion.

KeikoSc: Do we have last questions?

EmiA: Through the students, can your students in Canada become e-pals of Japanese students in Japan?

KarenCh: they can, and we do have student exchanges with our sister town in Gifu Prefecture

KarenCh: we have not actually done a pen-pal kind of exchange though

KeikoSc nods

KarenCh: just the in-person kind

EmiA: In person exchange has a limit, I think.

KeikoSc thinks

KarenCh: well, it's easier to find host families here now that we have Japanese language students to draw upon

KeikoSc: yah, yah.

EmiA: Only few students can get to go, right?

KarenCh: yes, that's true

KarenCh: but everyone here participates when we receive Japanese students

EmiA: Epals are cheap and everyone can participate.

KarenCh: and it would keep communication going in between times too

EmiA: Yes.

KeikoSc: Well, I think it is time to ask Karen sensei for last remarks...

KeikoSc looks at Karen sensei...

MikaW: I have to leave..thank you. Karen sensei and minasama

KeikoSc: otherwise..

KarenCh: thank you for coming!

KarenCh: I appreciate your thoughtful questions!

KeikoSc: Thank you for your contribution, Karen sensei...

KeikoSc claps loudly

KarenCh: I appreciate the opportunity, Keiko sensei

EmiA: Kagenagara ooenshitemasu. Ganbattekudasai.

KeikoSc: Thank you very much!

KarenCh: ganbarimasu

KeikoSc: Ochiai sensei, thanks for your continued participation.

KeikoSc: minna ganbarimashou!

KeikoSc does group hug

EmiA: Thank you, Schneider Sensee.

KeikoSc: doumo arigaout gozaimashita.

KarenCh: Keiko sensei?

KeikoSc: hai.

KeikoSc: Thank you very much for your contribution.

KeikoSc: I will put a report tomorrow morning.

KeikoSc bows deeply

KarenCh: I feel like running back to school and planning a bunch of new activities!!

KeikoSc chuckle

KarenCh: this was very energizing!

KeikoSc: You must have a lot of energy

KeikoSc: Too bad a lot of people couldn't make it.

KarenCh: well, I didn't before, but I do now!

KeikoSc: GREAT!

KeikoSc: I am thrilled to hear that.

KeikoSc claps again

KarenCh: yes, more people would have been nice, but it's OK for me as it was

KeikoSc: well, your download stats proves the interest.

KeikoSc: Yes,

KeikoSc: I have to get going for my class soon.

KarenCh: bye for now

KeikoSc: Thank you again!

KeikoSc bows deeply.

KarenCh: thank you!