

INTRODUCING JAPANESE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

If you are planning - or even contemplating - introducing Japanese language and culture courses in your school, be aware that you will face particular challenges:

- Japanese is a level 4 or most-difficult-to-learn language for most English and French-speaking Canadians.
- Tourism from and to Japan is a recent phenomenon. The Japanese-Canadian community is small. Consequently, your local community may not have been exposed to Japanese culture.
- The vital importance of deepening our knowledge of Japan and our capacity to communicate in Japanese may not be fully understood. Student, parent, teacher and administrator interest may need to be sparked.
- Japanese-language curricula and programs focused on Japan or the Pacific Rim are, for the most part, still under development or in the pilot testing phase.
- "Made-in-Canada" pedagogical materials are under development. To fill the gap, Canadian educators rely on materials produced in Japan, the United States, Australia and other Asian countries.
- There is a shortage of certified Canadian teachers of Japanese.

But wait - don't change your mind! As of 1993 over 50 school boards in Canada are offering Japanese-language programs, and others are teaching Japanese culture in either Japanese-studies or Pacific Rim modules. There are a variety of tools at your disposal and a number of strategies which have worked for school boards. Let's take a look at what you might do.

1. Familiarize yourself with the programs and materials in use in Canada.

Read this GUIDE thoroughly and send for the brochures and references cited.

Talk to your provincial/territorial program development or curriculum officials to find out what is available in your province and/or what type of module, course or program would be approved.

Talk to administrators and teachers in boards which now offer programs. Talk to a neighbouring school or board; some initiatives in Canada have been the result of solid collaborative efforts. If you are near a university or college, find out what they offer in this area and what resources might be available to help you. Find out about the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada (APF) and Japan Foundation programs. There is a lot of spade-work to be done.

2. Survey students, parents and administrators to determine the level of interest.

If interest is low, you may have to create it. Give thought to twinning with a school or board of education in Japan. If someone in your area has participated in the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET) or a study tour to Japan, ask them to talk to your students about their experiences in Japan. The JET Alumni Association (JETAA) may be able to help locate potential speakers. Contact the nearest Japanese diplomatic mission for the JETAA address in your region. Ask the Japanese diplomatic mission in your area, the Asia Pacific Foundation office closest to you or the Japan Foundation for information on resources which could be borrowed and used in the class - such as maps, videotapes, brochures, books.

Introduce small elements in various subject areas as a beginning.