

Title of Session: Benkyoukai - Learning and Teaching Kanji

Moderator: Keiko Schneider

Guest Speaker: Masako O. Douglas

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MasakoD: OK. Shall I start?

KeikoS: Please.

KeikoS: I am Keiko Schneider, a native of Japan, an ESL teacher and web designer, the organizer of benkyoukai.

MasakoD: Hello, minasama. It is good to SEE you on line. I am Masako Douglas. I teach JFL and JHL (Japanese as a heritage language) at Cal. State, Long Beach and Japanese Saturday school (young kids).

KeikoS: . o O (everybody, please?)

NorikoGst10: Douglas-sensee, and Minasama, konnichiwa. I am Noriko Fujioka. I teach Japanese at the University of Cincinnati.

MaryNGst7: I am Mary Noguchi, a kanji lover and learner from an alphabetic background.

LangtonGst5: I'm Nina Langton - I teach beginners level at Okanogan University in British Columbia, Canada, and children's school once a week

KeikoS: I can see about three more trying to get up here.

KeikoS: Naofumi sensei?

NaofumiGst9: I am Naofumi Tatsumi from Nara, but currently doing my Master in Mississippi, while student-teaching Japanese for my scholarship.

KeikoS: But if you like this chat window to be bigger, please look top right of this window...

KeikoS: Actions...

KeikoS: DETACH will make this window bigger

NaofumiGst9: Thank god. I should have known for a long time ago.

MasakoD: Well. Everybody introduced herself and himself?

JohnF joined the room.

KeikoS: Hi, John sensei, we are just introducing...

JohnF: Hi, This is John from UT EL Paso, working in the computer lab.

MasakoD: How do you do?

KeikoS: I would like to thank Douglas sensei for her contribution today.

KeikoS bows deeply

AkikoGst11 joined the room.

KeikoS: And first I would like her to summarize the paper.

KeikoS: Akiko sensei!

KeikoS: Have you all read the paper?

KeikoS: We are doing introduction..

MaryNGst7: Yes.

LangtonGst5: yes

NorikoGst10: So did I.

KeikoS: Just in case here is the URL. Blue one is a hyper link and you can click.

KeikoS: <http://www.sabotenweb.com/bookmarks/about/douglas.html>

MasakoD: You are very welcome. And thank you all for attending this benkyookai. Well, where to start?

KeikoS: We probably should start talking about the paper a little bit...

KeikoS: What sorts of reactions did you have?

KeikoS looks around

AkikoGst11: Thank you very much. To tell the truth, I could not read it, but I started to read it... I will listen first.

KeikoS bows to Masako sensei..

MasakoD: I am reading all the posting while my line was cut.

MasakoD: chotto mattekudasai ne.

KeikoS looks at Masako sensei

MasakoD: First of all, my motivation to study kanji learning by the learners from an alphabetic background was their frustration. I know kanji is one of the humps they have to go over. Off course there are exceptions - people who love kanji, like Noguchi sensei and Halpern san.

MaryNGst7: Well, I didn't always love kanji learning!

MasakoD: How about comments from Noguchi sensee and Nina sansee, who learned kanji as L2?

LangtonGst5: I found the statistics about how much can be read even knowing a small number of Kanji that you gave in the section on affective filters interesting, and I plan to use them - I think that will be encouraging for the students

MaryNGst7: I had to first find an effective way to learn kanji.

MasakoD: I agree.

MasakoD: Memorize effectively and retain as long as possible.

KeikoS nods solemnly

MasakoD: Did you have a point, where you felt kanji is not as difficult as before?

MaryNGst7: I feel it may be more productive to tell students from the beginning that they can learn all the general use characters and achieve true literacy.

LangtonGst5: I don't think anyone effectively explained to me the "systems" involved in kanji, so I try to do that more with my students

MaryNGst7: telling them they only need to know a small number gives them the idea that kanji learning is going to be an uphill battle for them.

MaryNGst7: The point at which I began to feel successful with kanji learning was when I learned to analyze their shapes.

MasakoD: I would suggest, as I wrote in the paper, to start prep to teach kanji earlier. i.e. stoke order when they learn hiragana, and emphasize katakata appear a lot in kanji.

In this way we can avoid a lot of work all at once when they start learning kanji,

KeikoS nods

LangtonGst5: I think it depends on their motivation for learning Japanese in the first place - if they are in it for the long haul, then they need encouragement to learn all the general use kanji, but those who are not as committed need to know that they can still read quite a bit if they have at least a basic number

LangtonGst5: most alphabet background students don't seem to care about stroke order, as long as the results look reasonable - no matter how much I stress it.

MaryNGst7: Yes, that is a good point, Langton sensei. Here in Japan I tend to meet kanji learners who are highly motivated.

LangtonGst5: I teach in a two-year program, so most students are just taking it as a general-interest elective

LangtonGst5: A lot of what I do is just survival level - for better or worse!

MasakoD: I read an article that says ability to reconstruct kanji from parts are strengthened by knowing correct stroke orders.

KeikoS listens intently

MasakoD: I think it depends on the goals of the curriculum and program needs.

LangtonGst5: I'm sure that is true - I know it works for me

MaryNGst7: I think the students would develop more interest in proper stroke order if they developed a love for actually producing the characters. Have you tried shuujii?

LangtonGst5: I have for myself, but not in class - that's an interesting idea!

MasakoD: It is true that enrollment decrease if we push students too much, esp if the program goals are just for enhancement. But on the other hand, J-majors should be able to read and write so kanji knowledge is a must.

LangtonGst5: Absolutely

AkikoGst11: My students get excited when they find out they can comprehend the sentences faster if they know the meaning of kanji. They get motivated. Especially the first year students need the motivation. Shuujii is great, too.

LangtonGst5: Shuujii would be a great way to use the knowledge of my Chinese international students to help the alphabet background students

LangtonGst5: We do use the videos online that show stroke order with a brush, but actually doing it would be that much better.

KeikoS: Gahoh

LangtonGst5: so

MasakoD: I did it to kids at J-school. Kakizome (new year's fist writing). It is good to disguise (sort of) the repetition of writing and kids enjoy it while repeatedly write the same kanji. I let them choose kanji to write, and one kids chose "hirune". All strokes were there. When they repeated writing, they memorize them!

MaryNGst7: Once students learn to see kanji as a construction of parts, instead of as a whole piece, they may have more interest in actually constructing that kanji. It's logical, it fits together...

NaofumiGst9: Speaking of Chinese, how do you all deal with a class with students from both an alphabetic background and Kanji background?

LangtonGst5: That's my problem too - I'm looking for suggestions!

NaofumiGst9: Perhaps, encourage students from Kanji background to help those from an alphabetic?

MasakoD: We all have the same situation in the US and Canada, and other places due to budget.

NaofumiGst9: When I observed a JPN class when I was in Canada. This seemed to be a major problem.

LangtonGst5: it's important to have them work together - otherwise the alphabet students get resentful that the Chinese have an "advantage" on the tests

NaofumiGst9: One of my Canadian friends was complaining about that.

NorikoGst10: Naofumi-sensee, tell us about your friend's complaint in detail.

MasakoD: Chinese students should learn too. Sounds of Japanese kanji are totally different.

NaofumiGst9: Well, it was like 4-5 years ago, and I don't remember exactly. But he said Chinese students had an advantage and ..

NaofumiGst9: why am I in the same class?

MasakoD: I emphasize this in the class in the beginning. And I weigh more on yomikata in kanji quiz so that all students are in the same ground.

LangtonGst5: That's true - they do have to put the effort in to learn the pronunciations
KeikoS nods solemnly

MasakoD: Off course kanji-kei students have an advantage because they can transfer concept of kanji from their L1.

NorikoGst10: Also, we sometimes have Japanese heritage learners who know a little Kanji. How do you handle this kind of situation, everyone?

MasakoD: I closed one of the sections for JFL and offer a course for JHL only.

NorikoGst10: How did you teach differently from regular JFL classes to JHL learners?

MasakoD: Because their conversation ability is way way up and it intimidates JFL learners. Students complained in Korean course at UCLA and they split these two groups.

MasakoD: I offer the course for JHL only here at Cal State Long Beach, too.

MasakoD: although it is hard to get enough students to maintain the course. I do a lot of advertisement to recruit students (big sigh).

NorikoGst10: I am very interested in the course for JHL because we do not have enough JHL students to offer a course for them here. Could you tell us about your course for JHL?

MaryNGst7: Masako-sensei, what are the requirements for entering the JHL class?

MaryNGst7: Do they take an interview test or something?

MasakoD: Spoken ability is advanced according to ACTFL scale and home language is Japanese.

NorikoGst10: Do you assess their writing and reading abilities, too?

MasakoD: Yes. We give a placement test to all incoming students. Those who scored very high, we interview and place them either JHL or JFL.

NorikoGst10: Is that placement test oral/aural?

NorikoGst10: Sorry, oral/aural should have been written.

MaryNGst7: I imagine you have a number of potential JHL students who are quite fluent but are at near zero kanji ability...

MasakoD: Hi. We assess kanji ability at placement, but reading and writing ability are varied.

MasakoD: My JHL course consists of different ability students. The course is individualized, so they can start at where they are and progress at their speed.

MaryNGst7: I imagine you have a number of potential JHL students who are quite fluent but at near zero in kanji ability...

KeikoS bows to Mary sensei

MasakoD: Yes. I have two in fall. But they learned quite well. Their post test scores were higher than pre test.

NorikoGst10: What is the most difficult issue you have when you teach specifically for JHL students?

MasakoD: This assessment is not an achievement test, but kanji proficiency. I always amazed that the post test scores are high for all students. This means that even if it is one semester, if they learn intentionally, they improve a lot.

NorikoGst10: How much do they improve in a semester?

MasakoD: Issue of teaching JHL? I think that instructor need to find which are they need to develop more. Because unlike JFL, students of JHL are individually different in their ability.

NorikoGst10: Yes, I would like to know their average scorewise.

MasakoD: Interestingly, I gave Japanese Nooryokushiken (grammar-1kyuu and 2 kyuu) to them. There is no common patterns in strong area and weak area. Their ability is just varied.

LangtonGst5: Does anyone encourage their students to take the kanji proficiency exam (I'm not sure of the exact name)? I get their brochures every year, and have been wondering if that kind of thing works as motivation for students.

KeikoS nods solemnly

KeikoS . o O (kanji kentei?)

LangtonGst5: yes, I think it is just known as "kan-ken"?

KeikoS looks at her watch

KeikoS: Well, Douglas sensei ... and all...

KeikoS: I think we have used up the time we have...

KeikoS: Any last comments or questions?

NorikoGst10: Douglas-sensee, Dooomoo arigatoo gozaimashita. I have to go.

LangtonGst5: Thank you all for your suggestions and advice!

MaryNGst7: It was a pleasure hearing about all of your experiences teaching kanji, everyone.

KeikoS: Thank you all for coming!

AkikoGst11: Thank you very much. This is my second time to join the benkyookai. arigatoo gozaimashita, Masako-sensei.

NaofumiGst9: Sensei's paper was very eye-opening and thought-provoking to me, being a budding teacher. Arigato gozaimasu.

KeikoS: Thanks for coming Akiko sensei.

KeikoS smiles

MaryNGst7: Thanks to Masako-sensei and Keiko-sensei.

KeikoS: Masako sensei, I think everybody is leaving...

JohnF: Thank You

KeikoS: Thanks so much for your presentation AND the paper!

AkikoGst11: Shuna-sensei, dewa mata. Thank you very much.

KeikoS bows

MasakoD: Thank you all for being here

KeikoS: doumo arigatou gozaimashita.

KeikoS . o O (I hope you can count this experience as your academic presentation...)

MasakoD: I will do count it.

KeikoS bows

MasakoD: dewa. bows. Thank you for giving me this opportunity. I really enjoyed it.

MaryNGst7: Masako-sensei, I would be honored if you would look at my website at

www.kanjiclinic.com

KeikoS: doumo arigatou gozaimashita.

MasakoD: I will go to your site now. Dewa.

MaryNGst7: Shitsurei shimasu.