

East Leeds Oriental Culture and Language Conference 'Kimono'

On 15th June 2007, students and staff from 6 schools gathered at Brigshaw High School and Language College in Castleford, to celebrate Oriental culture and language at the 'East Leeds Oriental Culture and Language Conference'. Participants were treated to an inspiring programme of workshops with a difference, ranging from Japanese and Chinese language tasters, to Lion and Ribbon dancing as well as Taiko and Manga sessions. What started as a dull and rainy day in East Leeds became a colourful and unique experience for all participants, both students and teachers alike. Read on for some background information about the objectives of this extraordinary scheme and what kind of opportunities it offered to students and teachers.

140 students and staff from 7 schools (including Brigshaw High) were entertained by Japanese and Chinese experts and presenters. Each student visited three different workshops, getting an insight into Japanese and Chinese language and culture. In their packs they found an inspiring message from the organisers at Brigshaw High School and Language College:

'Japan and China are already two of the strongest economies in the world and it is clear that when you leave school the importance of the Japanese and Chinese markets will be of immense value to the UK economy. A knowledge of Oriental languages and culture will therefore give you an advantage when looking for a job, as well as helping to broaden your horizons. Whether or not you can speak the languages fluently, an understanding of the culture of China and Japan is a critical success factor in mutual understanding. Today's 'Kimono' Conference is just the first step along the way – look out for further opportunities in the near future!'

The conference was the brain child of Simon Brass, Assistant Principal at Brigshaw High School and Language College, and supported by Leeds Aimhigher and Education Leeds. Colleagues from the Japan Foundation as well as from Chinese networks, helped to design an ambitious but well planned programme. The connection to the Japan Foundation London Language Centre started in 2006 when Simon Brass attended the annual Head Start Course – then, a three day crash course in Japanese language, with sessions on exams and resources - designed for Senior Managers with an interest in introducing Japanese into their schools' languages programmes. Simon was intrigued by Japanese and has been the driving force behind the running of extra-curricular Japanese classes at Brigshaw. A teacher of Japanese has just been appointed to expand the teaching of Japanese from September 2007.

All students at the Oriental Conference were entertained by Kakushow, a Japanese artist specialising in puppet rakugo, miracle bamboo blinds and paper cutting, who has performed at various venues across the UK and abroad. A series of highly creative Manga workshops were delivered by Sonia Loong from Sweatdrop, and some 'thundering' examples of Taiko Drumming were introduced by Mark Alcock, from Taiko Meantime. As for the Japanese taster sessions, these were delivered by Rie Sogo and Harumi Ball, two StepOutNet volunteers and by Akiko Kinoshita, a qualified teacher of Japanese who encouraged Simon Brass to attend the Head Start Course a few years ago, and now teaches Japanese at a number of schools in the area. StepOutNet is one of the JFLLC's core programmes, it involves volunteers delivering one off taster sessions at schools in their neighbourhood. StepOutNet helps the Japan Foundation to reach out to schools located all over the UK who are interested in Japanese language. (Contact the JFLLC for further details if you would like to have a visit arranged or if you would like to become a StepOutNet member yourself.) Lastly, staff from the JFLLC took the opportunity to run a 'Mini Head Start' Course for teachers who accompanied students from their various schools. These teachers walked away with a clearer picture of how Japanese could work for their schools. Everyone was invited to a Japanese Sushi lunch and Chinese sweets, overall quite a challenging choice of food for some of the participants!

The Japan Foundation was delighted to be involved in the Oriental Conference. Hopefully,

this attractive formula will inspire other schools to organise similar events. Please do not hesitate to contact the JFLLC to discuss this opportunity further. E-mail: info.language@jpf.org.uk or tel: 020 7436 6698



Learning Japanese with StepOutNet volunteers Rie and Harumi



Students learn to write their name in Japanese