

Issues in Developing a Program for Japanese Language Teacher Training

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Japanese language learning has boomed during the last few years in Australia, creating a greater demand for teachers of Japanese. In response to this need, teacher training programs have to be planned and developed. This paper looks at some of the issues and problems that should be considered by teacher educators when they are creating and establishing a Japanese language teacher training program. The setting of this examination is within a pre-service Bachelor of Education degree, a Diploma of Education course, or a conversion course for teachers who are upgrading their qualifications at university. The paper looks at issues and problems associated with basic assumptions, aims, and methods of Japanese language teacher training programs, and notes the effects of the type of student, the location of a program, the duration of a course, the availability of resources, and the educational approach used by the teaching institution upon the development and operation of a program. The article also examines distance education and makes some suggestions about satellite courses networking, and apprentice-style learning modes.

Currently, Australia is witnessing a rapid rise in the number of people seeking to learn the Japanese language. Those wishing to learn are encouraged by various policies of the Commonwealth and State Governments as Australia seeks closer ties and understanding with Japan now and in the future. In practical terms, this flourishing of interest in Japan and the Japanese language means a greater demand for teachers of Japanese, primarily in elementary and high schools, but also in short-term and specific-use courses. The need for teachers generates the need for courses in teacher education. The question of “How to teach the teachers of Japanese,” raises a number of important

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issues which need to be examined and reflected upon by people wishing to develop an effective training course.

The following examination focuses upon some issues and problems involved in the development of the curriculum subject, "Japanese language teaching," as a component of a pre-service Bachelor of Education, or Diploma of Education course, or a 'Conversion' Education course for teachers upgrading their qualifications at university. It proceeds under the headings of "Assumptions," "Aims," and "Method," with some model suggestions and possible approaches to items of issue.

Assumptions

The main assumption is that students undertaking a teachers' training course in Japanese will have basic competency in the Japanese language, requiring at least two years of Japanese language studies at university level with appropriate fluency in all the key learning areas: reading, writing, speaking, and listening comprehension. "Cross-cultural contacts in today's world require that teachers possess a working competence in the language they teach. The teacher acts, among other things, as a model of Japanese for his/her students" (Neustupný, 1992).

Having a working competency in the Japanese language is not in itself sufficient for the teaching of it as a second language. Prospective teachers will need an understanding of how a second language is acquired. Through an understanding of the meaning of language and its functions, and language learning, teachers will better understand strategies required for effective Japanese teaching and will use them. Long et al. (1984) found that teachers can be trained to adjust the way they interact in class such as asking students fewer display questions (closed questioning), and more referential questions (open questioning). Further, an appreciation of the fact that "language" is not a static thing but rather a dynamic ever-changing thing (as shown by the increasing number of katakana words in Japanese language), will alert teachers to the need to keep pace with change and be flexible and innovative in how they teach Japanese.

Various assumptions can be made about the types of students who would be studying in a Japanese language teacher's training course. In Australia, the following are some of the types which can be identified. First are undergraduates who are doing the subject as a final part of a four-year Bachelor of Education course. Such students would already have been involved in the study of Education as a subject, and have had some limited experience in a classroom in a teaching practicum.

Second are the post-graduates, who could either be persons doing a Diploma of Education, and thus experiencing their first contact with Education as a subject, or persons who are currently teaching and who are doing a "Conversion" course to upgrade their qualifications. Included in the latter type would be teachers who are already teaching a language other than English in school, and who are doing such a course to help introduce Japanese into their school curriculum. Among students of each of the foregoing groups are those who already speak a language other than English, in contrast to those who have only an English-speaking background. The type of student being

taught will have some influence upon how the course for teachers of the Japanese language is developed and conducted.

Another assumption to be made about running a language teachers' training course is that students will have access to relevant books, journals, textbooks and those particular items which are peculiar to the teaching of the Japanese language. The problems of availability, suitability, variety, and access to resources essential to the learning of Japanese needs to be addressed in the development of a course of this kind. A case in point would be where students are undertaking such a course by distance education because the issue of being separated from the central teaching institution will limit their access to human and material resources.

A further assumption which needs to be considered is that teacher training "ends" at the completion of a Japanese language teacher's training course. A better vision of teacher training in this field would be that it begins with this course, with continuing in-service training and renewal courses being integral to the ongoing development of effective Japanese language teachers. Realistically, however, the constraints of time, distance, and money mean that these types of specialized Teacher Training courses are usually all that many teachers are able to undertake. Therefore, an initial training course at university must be varied and dense enough to cover the most basic needs of a person who may not undertake any further formal courses.

Aims

As hinted above, course aims will be affected by the type of learner, the type of institution that offers the course, and by other factors relevant to specific needs. Certain areas of Japanese language teacher training will, however, be similar, and I outline a few of them below.

A Japanese language teacher training course should aim to prepare teachers to create, plan, execute, and monitor courses/units of study in Japanese independently. This self-development should help the teacher of Japanese recognize the need to work within constraints, such as departmental and school policies, available resources and specific needs, and the types and levels of the students, when they have to establish and run a Japanese language course.

The encouragement of initiative, innovation and flexibility in the teaching of Japanese is also another important aim of a teacher training course. New Japanese language teachers such as "first year out" teachers posted to small country schools may find themselves in lean learning environments which are limited in resources, short on staffing and hampered by lack of understanding (and perhaps in some cases even hostility) by other teachers. Such new teachers will need to draw on ingenuity and confidence learnt in their Japanese language teacher training course. Of benefit to such new teachers is an awareness of the dangers of novelty in course development; of ad hoc approaches that produce an unsystematic patchwork course which meets immediate needs, but fails in long-term results.

The teacher training program should aim to develop the teachers' competency in key

areas of Japanese language teaching; reading, writing, speaking, and listening comprehension. Specific difficulties in the teaching of reading and writing Japanese need to be examined and addressed. The use of kanji and kana presents difficulties not encountered in the teaching of other languages, and the teaching of honorifics and humble speech also presents challenges that are unique to Japanese.

Another issue that a Japanese language teachers' training course should aim to address is that of the social, historical and cultural setting of the Japanese language, for as Edward Sapir says ". . . language does not exist apart from culture, that is, the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of our life" (Lo Bianco, 1987). To avoid the past mistakes of teaching a foreign language divorced from its cultural setting, a course should aim to encourage future teachers to give the Japanese language its richness by contextualising it in a living environment and making it relevant in real themes and topics.

Vital to any Japanese language course are teaching aids and teaching materials. Giving students the means and opportunity to examine the various merits, deficiencies and drawbacks of available books, textbooks, and teaching aids would be valuable in helping them decide the usefulness and effectiveness of these items in the Japanese Language program they may eventually have to teach.

A Japanese language teachers' training course should also aim to equip teachers with the ability to evaluate effective methods of student assessment, and to remedy students' deficiencies.

Method

Assuming that a Japanese language teacher training course is a one-year unit as part of a Bachelor of Education or Diploma of Education, the course method will be constrained by the limits of time and circumstance. As mentioned above, these types of training courses are generally the only methodological instruction that many teachers receive. The implication is that this initial training course needs to be a concentrated "smorgasbord" of ways of teaching Japanese, especially since Japanese language teachers are called upon to teach Japanese Language programs from the first to the final year of high school.

The issue of finding a balance in the method of teacher education is a different problem. In terms of course content, how much of the course should one devote to the theoretical and philosophical dimension of Japanese language teaching, and how much to the concrete and practical? There will of course be a component of practice teaching done in the living environment of a school classroom. For these practicums to be useful and effective, however, the beginning teachers of Japanese will need enough initial material to take and use in their practice, and to reflect upon when the practice is completed. Further, they will need to receive good models of teaching practice from their instructors. "If, for example . . . we impress on our trainees that teachers must be flexible, approachable, and equipped with simple visual aids, and yet we ourselves lecture for a full hour with no time for questions, discourage the trainees from coming to

us out of class, and limit our visual aids to a few words poorly scribbled on the blackboard, our trainees will repeat what we SAY in their exams, but repeat what we DO in their classes" (Dobbyn and Hill, 1979).

Course presentation will be influenced by the setting of the teacher training course. If the course is being run at a university or an institute of higher education, then a system of lectures, tutorials and workshops can be conducted without too much trouble. When these institutions are located near large population centers, there is the possibility of student-teachers visiting a variety of schools where Japanese is taught, as well as being able to receive instruction from a number of different educators.

Teaching a Japanese language teachers' program by distance education requires a certain amount of creative organization, particularly in Australia, where teachers who wish to do a Japanese language teachers' course, but who are restricted by distance, time and money, could be involved in what may be called satellite courses. Satellite courses would occur when local groups organized from the central institution are active, offering short intensive workshop sessions in nominated major regional cities. These sessions would be components of a comprehensive packaged correspondence course organized and supervised by the central teaching institution. A method such as this offers certain other possibilities.

Firstly, these local groups could become resource centers not only for the initial training of Japanese language teachers, but also be places for continuing in-service and renewal for practicing teachers. Secondly, they could be places for the networking of information, keeping isolated teachers of the Japanese language abreast of the latest trends in Japanese language education. They also could possibly be centers for special ceremonies and seminars relevant to the teaching of the Japanese language and culture. Thirdly, they could lend themselves to the extended "buddy" system of *senpai* and *kōhai*, by which a more senior experienced teacher currently teaching in that region guides and tutors candidates in the Japanese language teachers' training program, following the central teaching institute's guidelines.

The main issue in the assessment of a Japanese language teachers' training program is similar to that of methodology: how much weight to give to each of the theoretical and practical elements of the course. This issue could be answered by reference to the target learners. For example, a concurrent course such as a pre-service Bachelor of Education program would need to focus assessment on developing the students' Japanese language competence. However, in a course like a Diploma of Education, the need would be to target the pedagogical aspects of language teaching, as students doing an end-on course would tend to be strong in language competence but deficient in teaching experience.

A certain amount of care must be exercised to ensure that a teachers' training program does not produce "Japanese style" teachers of Japanese, following the traditional notion of a teacher as one who dispenses knowledge to the passive student receivers, rather than one who facilitates knowledge. As Tazuko Monane acknowledges, many native Japanese teachers who teach Japanese to non-native students are teaching such courses using a unidirectional teacher-student method. Such a methodology replicates

the manner in which they themselves were taught, through copious amounts of testing and slavish reproduction of set packages of knowledge and activities (Monane, 1990).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Educators of future Japanese Language teachers can go through a number of recognizable procedures in the development of an effective training program. The following are the most common in this process: identifying and defining needs, goals, objectives, and priorities; determining and designing the course system, components and sequence in the light of resource constraints and availability of alternatives; selecting and/or developing instructional materials and appropriate student assessment procedures; and utilizing practical field analysis, reflection, revision, modification, and operation.

The final stage of course development carries the implication of what Gagné and Briggs call "Planned Recycling" (1974). This means that no matter how well a course is designed initially, modifications will constantly need to be made based on course progress and reflection in order for it to be fully effective. Nunan concurs with this important aspect of teacher training in his "Process Syllabus" model of course development, pointing out that "... much of the most valuable course development occurs while a course is actually being taught" (Nunan, 1985).

Developing a program for Japanese language teacher training presents a unique challenge for the teacher trainer as the demand for more Japanese language teachers increases. Expectations upon the training institutes by governments, the public and students of Japanese will call forth innovation, originality, and flexibility in the growing area of Japanese language education.

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