Australian National Curriculum Guidelines for Japanese
- Application to Japan -

オーストラリア国立日本語カリキュラム
ー日本への応用ー

Anita Gesling
(ASIJ)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PURPOSE OF STUDY

INTRODUCTION TO THE ALL GUIDELINES
- *8 Principles*
- *5 Goals*
- *6 Activity Types*
- *Teaching Script*
- *Assessment*

INTRODUCTION TO THE JAPANESE CURRICULUM GUIDELINES

APPLICATION TO JAPAN
- *In general*
  - Overseas students
  - Businessmen and business women
  - Foreign Workers
  - Returnees
  - Foreign spouses
  - Foreign children

CONCLUSION

REFERENCES

Purpose of study

The purpose of this paper is to briefly outline some important features of the Australian Language Levels (ALL) Guidelines and the Australian National Curriculum Guidelines for Japanese and then to examine the relevancy of these documents to the teaching of Japanese as a second or foreign language in Japan.

The paper will take the following format. A short introduction to the eight principles, five goals and six activity types which are critical to the use of the curriculum guidelines; a brief look at the Australian recommendations for teaching the Japanese scripts and assessment of students; and a discussion of the relevancy and application of the ALL Guidelines and national curriculum to the teaching of Japanese in Japan. For all except the final section more details and information can be found in the references listed at the end of this paper.

Introduction to the ALL Guidelines

Space prohibits anything except a very brief introduction to some of the main points of the Australian Language Levels (ALL) Guidelines. The National Curriculum Guidelines for Japanese were developed based on the recommendations put forward in the ALL Guidelines; a document which is relevant to the teaching of all foreign languages in Australia and emphasises an activities-based approach. The national curriculum acknowledges that the ALL Guidelines may need certain modifications in order to accommodate the teaching of Japanese, especially where the teaching of script is concerned.

8 Principles

The ALL Guidelines and subsequently the national curriculum, begin with the following Rationale of eight principles of teaching and learning.

Learners learn a language best when:

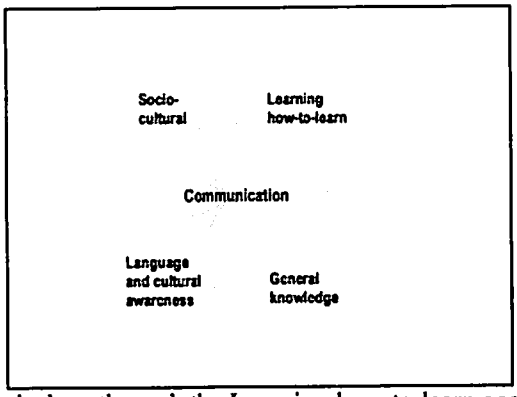
1. they are treated as individuals with their own needs and interests
2. they are provided with opportunities to participate in communicative use of the target language in a wide range of activities
3. they are exposed to communicative data which is comprehensible and relevant to their own needs and interests
4. they focus deliberately on various language forms, skills and strategies in order to support the process of language acquisition
5. they are exposed to socio-cultural data and direct experience of the culture embedded within the target language
6. they become aware of the role and nature of language and culture
7. they are provided with appropriate feedback about their progress
8. they are provided with opportunities to manage their own learning.

(*ALL Guidelines* Book 1, page 17)

5 Goals

Important to any foreign language study are the goals. Five broad goals are detailed by the ALL Guidelines and these are further broken down into specific goals. Once again the ALL Guidelines detailed the broad and specific goals and the Japanese national curriculum writers applied them to the learning of Japanese.

The broad goals are best illustrated in the following diagram. Source: *ALL Guidelines*, Book 1 page 31.



The broad communication goal relates to students being able to use the language for communication, particularly when relating to people, accessing information, studying, conducting business or in a holiday situation. The broad socio-cultural goal is designed to give students an understanding of a foreign culture, a positive attitude towards that culture and a better understanding of their own identity and values. Students should be encouraged to take control of their own learning and this is done through the Learning-how-to-learn goal. The skills involved in learning a foreign language are also developed through this broad goal. In order to better understand the surrounding world, students should think about the roles that language and culture play in society in everyday life. As a result of this reflection, encouraged through the language and cultural awareness goals, students will be better equipped to act appropriately throughout their own life. The general knowledge goals are self-explanatory, with students broadening their knowledge, particularly in areas which interest them, in a wide range of fields and subject areas.

Each of these broad goals is broken down into specific goals and concrete examples are provided for the language teacher to consider when developing and teaching foreign language courses.

6 Activity Types

The activities-based approach is central to the teaching and learning of all foreign languages in Australia. The national curriculum provides a series of suggested activities for inclusion in each course, under each of the 6 different types of activities detailed in the ALL Guidelines. The 6 activity types are divided into three dimensions. The interpersonal dimension, informational dimension and the aesthetic dimension.

Activity types one and two come under the interpersonal dimension. Type 1 involves *interacting and discussing topics of interest* for example one's *ideas and experiences* and type 2 involves *interacting to get things done* for example *solving a problem* or *making arrangements*. In the informational dimension activity-type 3 is about collecting and then using information. Listening to a weather forecast and then deciding what to wear is one example. Activity-type 4 involves *giving information*; an example would include *a talk about a holiday outing*. The aesthetic dimension of activity-types 5 and 6, necessitate a personal reaction. In activity-type 5 for example responding to *a video program* or *a picture* is classified as *making a personal response. Personal expression* is the key to activity-type 6, and this could include *writing a poem,* or *performing a skit.*

Naturally, one activity might come under more than one dimension or more than one activity-type. However teachers are encouraged to use activities from all the different activity types over a period of time.

Teaching Script

The ALL Guidelines do not discuss the teaching of script because it is a general document applicable to all foreign languages and the learning of a foreign language for an Australian student does not always involve the learning of a new script. The national curriculum however, does address the teaching of hiragana, katakana and kanji. It is suggested that hiragana be taught to the students first, although not necessarily to the exclusion of katakana. There may be great value in introducing the students to commonly used words in katakana, and their own name.

Recognition of the hiragana characters is considered to be step one. This can be accomplished in a couple of lessons using an appropriate mnemonic technique. Exercises for developing recognition skills in students are included in the national curriculum. Once students have developed recognition skills they are encouraged to develop reading skills; once again relevant activities are suggested.

Once the students are able to read the script, three steps are recommended for the introduction of writing. Firstly *limited reproduction* such as copying, tracing or even moulding the characters or words. Secondly *guided writing* such as that necessary to fill in the blanks or compose a short paragraph. Finally *free writing* is recommended. It is here that students begin to write short answers to questions or short pieces of information.

Kanji is generally the final script to be introduced to the students. Whilst there are recommendations as to which kanji should be introduced the speed at which they are introduced and the number of kanji to be taught is left up to the individual school or teacher to decide. The guidelines encourage the introduction of kanji for recognition, the decision to insist that students can write the characters is once again at the discretion of the final course.

The national curriculum makes suggestions about how to introduce the characters, and provides some examples of activities.

Assessment

The ALL Guidelines devote a significant amount of space to the issue of assessment. Far too much to even attempt to outline here. Following on from this the national curriculum devotes an entire chapter to the topic, indicating its importance. Teachers are encouraged to think about why assessment is necessary and to only assess something a learner has actually learnt. Formative and summative types of assessment are encouraged. The former to determine the learner's understanding at a particular point in the course. The latter to determine an overall picture of what has been learned.

To assist the teacher with formative assessment procedures, the national curriculum includes a range methods of assessment and assessment support materials. These materials can be copied and used or modified in the classroom to assist in the assessment of a student's progress.

Introduction to the Japanese Curriculum Guidelines

The Australian national curriculum guidelines for Japanese, include not only excerpts from the Australian Language Levels Guidelines, as mentioned above, but also a detailed list of modules from which classroom teachers and schools are able to develop their own detailed courses.

The curriculum is divided into four stages. Stage one is also divided into stage A and stage B for study at primary school. Students begin or continue studying at a certain stage depending on their age and year at school. The curriculum is designed so that there are several entry points for new students. Each stage has general objectives and a detailed list of suggested language content, including language functions, notions, exponents and kanji for recognition.

Each stage is divided into modules. The modules include module objectives, (script objectives noted separately), other learning experiences (which may be conducted in English) suggested units of work, suggested activities, a module checklist and some suggested kanji for recognition. The module checklist is a list of key functions and notions, as well as suggested language exponents. These are related to the title of the module and can be divided and taught as separate units. Under suggested activities, is a wide range of activities, divided into the six different activity types and the three different dimensions (mentioned above). A teachers' handbook of resources which can be photocopied for classroom use is also available. Using all this available information it is intended that each school will develop their own courses to suit the needs of their particular students.

Application to Japan

In general

The ALL Guidelines are applicable to Japan. In fact there are probably many teachers already teaching Japanese in Japan and around the globe who are incorporating the ideas and concepts described in the ALL Guidelines. The principles, broad goals, specific goals and different types of activities are applicable to any foreign language study in any country, they are certainly not limited to Japan. It would be a rare foreign language teacher who argued that the ideas are of no value or importance.

Unlike the ALL Guidelines it is difficult to make a blanket statement that the Australian National Curriculum Guidelines for Japanese is equally as valuable and applicable to Japan and other countries around the world. That is just not the case. The National Curriculum Guidelines for Japanese have been developed with a specific target group in mind; the Australian school student. These students have their own needs, desires and backgrounds

which differ considerably from the majority of people who are studying Japanese in Japan. I would now like to examine some of the larger groups of Japanese language students in Japan and the relevance, or not, of the National Curriculum Guidelines for Japanese.

Overseas students

Overseas students are those defined as studying at a university in Japan or preparing for language proficiency tests in preparation for study at a Japanese university. Many of these students need to pass, or at least take the Japanese language proficiency test held in December each year. This is a multiple choice test, designed to test reading comprehension, vocabulary, listening and a variety of other skills, but not speaking. Speaking is a major focus of the National Curriculum Guidelines for Japanese. Reading, kanji and skills important to study at the university level are much less important. As such the curriculum alone will not prepare students for study at the tertiary level in Japan.

Secondly the curriculum only covers the beginning level of Japanese. Much more material is required. The curriculum is English-based. That is, the texts, resources and explanations are all in English. Most of the overseas students in Japan are from Asia, where English is not their native language. In a classroom of different nationalities, English may be a common second or third language, however it is preferable if as much communication as possible takes place in Japanese.

As mentioned above, the curriculum has been written for students aged 5 to 18 years old. Many of the activities suggested would not be suitable for adults. Students from a country where rote learning and memorisation skills have become finely tuned, will find it difficult to believe that a communicative activity has any value for them. Whilst some of the activities may be valuable, the course as a whole would not suit overseas students.

Businessmen and business women

As Japan's role as a world economic and trade power has increased over recent years, so has the number of non-Japanese companies and businessmen. These companies and businessmen need fluent Japanese speakers in order to be able to carry out their work more efficiently. Although native Japanese people have been relied upon to provide translation and interpretation, the overseas business men and women feel a need to learn Japanese to make not only their work, but also their private lives in Japan easier. Even the attempt by an overseas employee to learn Japanese has a positive effect on the office climate; a few words related to shopping, catching trains and other daily activities, makes the foreigner's stay in Japan less stressful.

Whilst some parts of the Australian Curriculum Guidelines for Japanese would be applicable to the business world, some parts are totally irrelevant. It is unlikely that an adult would be very interested, or find it necessary to learn about Japanese school festivals. (The children of these people are most likely to be educated at an international school in Japan, in either their own language or English). On the other hand, Australian school students are interested in what their peers are doing overseas and may one day come to Japan and experience it for themselves. The Australian Curriculum will not instruct the business

person about etiquette at Japanese "drinking parties". Although the grammar structures will be relevant the vocabulary would need to be changed in order to better reflect the needs of an office or meeting situation. The sociocultural, cultural awareness and general knowledge aspects of learning Japanese will have a different emphasis for a business person than for a school student; however the communication and learning-how-to-learn goals will be appropriate for any learner.

Depending on the foreign business person's needs, they will find the Australian curriculum lacking in areas such as reading and writing skills and the level of language attained. A person who wants to survive on his own in Japan will most likely find his/her needs met in the curriculum, with only minor adjustment. However someone who wants to conduct business in Japan would be better advised to study a course with an emphasis on business.

Foreign workers

This group of people includes many illegal aliens residing in Japan as well as those with a proper visa. Many of these foreign workers are from the Middle Eastern nations or South America. Often they are involved in jobs which require hard physical labour. This kind of work can be dangerous and therefore the ability to understand instructions and directions can be an essential part of their necessary language. These people may have no need to really read and write Japanese in the workplace; however that changes when they live for a long period of time in a Japanese community. Bank forms, hospital forms, city office forms and notes from the utilities companies which arrive in their letterbox, are just a few of the occasions when a foreign worker would benefit from being able to read and write some Japanese.

For these people the National Curriculum Guidelines provide a suitable teaching methodology but do not necessarily provide all the necessary content. The communicative approach with an oral/aural focus, supported by the study of reading and writing will help these people to learn more about the Japanese language and culture. By making the vocabulary and situations more relevant to the learner, grammatical structures can be introduced in the recommended order. It is unlikely that all the learners will be able to speak English so it would be necessary to make the necessary changes to the resources.

Returnees

The number of people returning to Japan after a prolonged stay in China following world war II is increasing. These people cover a wide age range and intend to reside in Japan permanently. Their need is to be able to survive on their own in Japan as quickly as possible and then to master the language to the extent that they can live successfully without having to rely on other people. Since many of these people are elderly and have grown up in China they are already kanji literate. Therefore there is no need to place an emphasis on learning how to learn kanji, however the learners need to be encouraged to read and write Japanese kanji in the Japanese rather than the Chinese way.

The National Curriculum Guidelines' focus on listening and speaking is suited to these learners' needs, however the emphasis on games and activities may meet with some

opposition by people for whom this style of learning is unfamiliar. To some people, especially adults, they cannot see the value of "playing a game", because they do not understand that they are practising something important in a non-threatening environment. Once again, although the goals and principles are very relevant, the content will need amending to better reflect the learners' needs and proficiency in the English language.

Foreign spouses

These men and women encounter a range of problems and issues unknown by the average couple, only one of which is the non-Japanese person's proficiency in the Japanese language. If the non-Japanese partner is fluent then the number of problems decreases, however limited or no language ability on the part of the non-Japanese person can be difficult. These people are often highly motivated, but their attempts to learn are often inhibited by their commitments to their families. Time to study is a major concern, especially when there are young children.

Like the aforementioned groups the goals and principles of the National Curriculum Guidelines would meet the needs of these women and men. The teaching methodology would be suitable if these adults could be persuaded that they were learning and not just playing. The content would need to be modified to better suit the vocabulary needs and situations which these people are likely to face. Parents could be encouraged to do the games and activities with their children (who often speak good Japanese). The advantages from this would be numerous.

Foreign children

Foreign children studying in Japan can be grouped into two main groups; those studying at Japanese schools and those studying at international schools. The situations of these students are very different and as such will be discussed separately in the following paragraphs.

The number of foreign students in regular Japanese schools has increased dramatically in recent years. Much of this is due to a change in immigration laws and an influx of descendants of Japanese people from South America. The children of these people are enrolling in a regular Japanese school, however they have never learnt nor studied Japanese. The Japanese school system is not accustomed to dealing with the problem of students in the classroom who do not speak Japanese, but the Ministry of Education has begun dealing with the problem by producing textbooks and arranging specialist teachers of Japanese to help the children.

Many of the children do not speak English so the National Curriculum in its current form would be unsuitable for direct use in the classroom. Nevertheless it would make an excellent teacher resource because it is written in English and the Japanese teachers have experience with this language. The language introduced and the activities suggested are relevant to the age group and with slight modification could be used successfully. The modifications would be to ensure that the exercises were accessible to the students. For example, if the English was inappropriate it would be removed and replaced (if necessary)

by something else. Secondly, some of the exercises are based in Australia and may be culturally inaccessible to the South American students. For example, in a listening exercise the students on tape live in Australian cities, which, while familiar to Australian students would be unknown to students of other countries. Likewise, hobbies, families and living conditions etc. reflect the Australian lifestyle and need to be checked to ensure that there is nothing there which would be culturally unfamiliar or offensive to students from non-western countries.

Students at international schools would benefit greatly from using the National Curriculum Guidelines and supporting materials. These resources have already been used successfully at a number of international schools around Japan. Many of these schools have English as the main language of instruction and students in the Japanese classes, studying Japanese as a second or foreign language come primarily from western countries so the possibility of cultural misunderstanding is lessened, although the focus on Australia and the use of Australian place names may occasionally cause problems.

The resources are appropriate to the age level, written in a common language and incorporate exercises and activities relevant to the learners. Lacking from the National Curriculum is a section related to direct application. Due to the difficulty of interacting with native speakers of Japanese in some areas of Australia, there is very little in the Guidelines which relates to interacting in the community in Japanese. Practical application outside of the classroom is an important element in learning a foreign language and teachers using this program in Japan should be encouraged to send the students into the street to use the language which they have learned.

These materials would not be appropriate for students in Japan studying Japanese as a native language, because then the goals change and the content matter is far beyond that which is suggested in the National Curriculum Guidelines.

Conclusion

The goals and principles detailed in the ALL Guidelines are relevant to all language learners in Japan. The Australian National Curriculum Guidelines are relevant to the study of Japanese as a foreign or second language here in Japan. However depending on the target group some modifications are necessary.

Modification of the guidelines is least required for students studying Japanese at international schools around Japan. Rather an addition to the guidelines emphasising practical application is important. Other modifications related to the different groups who study Japanese in Japan relate essentially to the fact that the Australian program has been written for Australian school students and their needs are obviously different from the needs of adult or overseas students studying in Japan. Sometimes it is just a difference in vocabulary and by changing the vocabulary introduced the language forms can still be introduced in the same order. The teaching methodology may meet with opposition from some students and this may inhibit their learning process. The fact that the resources are all in English will not be useful to students who have limited or no English language skills.

The ALL Guidelines and the Australian National Curriculum Guidelines for Japanese are relevant to each group of learners but could not be used exclusively in the current format. Amendments and modifications would be necessary in order to better meet the needs of the different groups of students who study Japanese as a second language in Japan.

References

Coveney, T., Masahito, T., Honma, N. Japanese In Modules, ALC, Tokyo, 1993

Holden, M. (ed) Yoroshiku: Moshi Moshi Teachers' Handbook Stages 1 & 2, Curriculum Corporation, Carlton, Australia, 1993

Moore B., & Angus J. (eds) Yoroshiku: Niko Niko Teachers' Handbook Stages A & B, Curriculum Corporation, Carlton, Australia, 1993

Scarino, A., Vale, D., McKay, P., Clark, J. All Guidelines Book 1, Language Learning in Australia; ALL Guidelines Book 2 Syllabus, Development and Programming; ALL Guidelines Book 3 Method, Resources, and Assessment; ALL Guidelines Book 4 Evaluation Curriculum Renewal, and Teacher Development, Curriculum Development Centre, Canberra, 1988