

Editor's Introduction

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The proceedings of the National Symposium on Japanese Language Education provide a snapshot that records a significant period of the history of Japanese language education in Australia from local, national and global perspectives. NSJLE was held a week after then-Prime Minister Julia Gillard's launch of the *Australia in the Asian Century* white paper, and the timing made us even more aware of the importance for all Japanese language educators to have the chance to hear a plurality of perspectives in an era when the global agenda pushes change on the national agenda, which in turns becomes policy that has the potential to have an large influence on local programs.

The symposium theme, *Creating the Future*, is a reflection of the history and the current state of Japanese language education in Australia. Blessed with a number of talented and highly professional Japanese language educators at all levels; fortunate enough to have the support of a variety of bodies, including the Australian Government and The Japan Foundation; and backed by a stable and prosperous relationship between Australia and Japan economically and strategically, as well as in people-to-people links, Japanese language education in Australia has thrived to achieve world-class outcomes in both education quality and the number of learners. This volume celebrates these successes by sharing innovative practices by Australian teachers of Japanese.

However, the future we are to create is filled with uncertainties: changing governments and their policies; the so-called "China threat" that accompanies the rise of Chinese language programs to the detriment of other language programs; Japan's never ending economic down-turn; and the possibility, and in some cases reality, of Japanese language program closures. One of the aims of the symposium was to start a dialogue among stakeholders to create a national council of Japanese language education. For us to actively participate in creating the future of Australian Japanese language education, and to creatively turn uncertainties into allies, we need a venue for continuing discussion. It is hoped that these proceedings will offer strategies for advocacy and ideas for discussions, and pave the way for such a national body.

Just as the symposium was a successful integration of many layers of difference, this volume embraces multiple perspectives. Contributors range from primary school teachers and postgraduate students, to national opinion leaders and internationally renowned academics. Issues raised encompass language policies, information and communications technology, classroom instruction and advocacy. The collection also contains papers in both English and Japanese.

The volume is divided into three sections. The first, *Cutting-Edge Language Education*, begins with a paper by Yasu-Hiko Tohsaku on advocacy. The paper is not only cutting-edge on its own, but also a tool for staying at the cutting edge in providing concrete strategies for advocacy of Japanese language education. Angela Scarino's paper follows, highlighting the cutting edge of Australia's national agenda, and exploring the way in which the Australian National Curriculum and its adaptation for languages will potentially have a sizeable impact on what and how we teach Japanese in schools—and consequently, in universities. Hiroko Kataoka then brings differentiated instruction and assessment to the horizon, which, no doubt to many readers, a brand-new idea in language teaching and learning. It challenges the currently prominent one-size-fits-all approach to teaching and testing, and bring us to the forefront of classroom practices.

The Plenary Panel Discussion echoes the diverse and pressing issues in Australian Japanese language education of 2012. The panel is mediated by Robyn Spence-Brown, and includes comments from Matthew Absalom (President, Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations), Anne de Kretser (Director, Melbourne Centre for Japanese Language Education), Kathe Kirby (Executive Director, Asia Education Foundation), Carolyn Stevens (President 2011-2013, Japanese Studies Association of Australia), Chihiro Kinoshita Thomson (Australian representative for the Japanese Global Network), Yasu-Hiko Tohsaku (then President, American Association of Teachers of Japanese) and Kent Anderson (Pro-Vice Chancellor [International], University of Adelaide). These comments are inevitably situated in each participant's own context, and a number of issues raised in the panel are relevant to the discussion on the creation of a national council.

We then move on to share innovative practices. Two papers, by Wendy Venning and Mariel Howard, are descriptions of energetic and inspiring practices at local primary schools. Although the content of the papers is very different—one is on computer technology and the other is on speech contests—the authors' passion and love for the Japanese language and the students in their programs is outstanding and inspiring. The success of these primary school innovations is extremely encouraging, and worthwhile communicating to many. The paper by Sarah Pasfield-Neofitou, Masae Uekusa and Mari Morofushi considers the use of tablet PCs in the teaching of Japanese at tertiary level. This is an important indication of how the incorporation of technology has become a topic relevant to all levels of Japanese teaching. Aya Kondoh and Hyogyung Kim then propose process-oriented and case-based approaches to the instruction of business Japanese, a contribution that might save many business ventures in the future by equipping learners with global communication skills. The papers in this section provide a glimpse of best practices in Japanese language education.

The *Food for Thought* section includes two very different papers. They highlight groups that surround mainstream Japanese language education: heritage speakers and postgraduate students. Although the number of heritage learners of Japanese and postgraduate students in Japanese applied and educational linguistics is small, they do and will continue to play major roles in the overall scheme of Japanese language education in Australia.

This was our first attempt at publishing proceedings arising from a teachers' symposium. As the Chief Editor, I first thought that I would like to see more research oriented papers in the proceedings; however, current research culture at Australian universities does not necessarily encourage academics to contribute research papers to a publication such as this one. In hindsight, it is good that we have been able to provide an outlet for innovative and inspiring local practices.

I would like to express my gratitude to The Japan Foundation, Sydney, for editorial assistance in the production of this volume. Thanks, too, to all the contributors, review committee members, editorial and support team members, especially Yutaka Nakajima and Matthew Todd.

In closing this introduction and looking forward to the next volume, I hope that this publication becomes the front-line for cutting-edge practices of Japanese language teaching and learning at all levels.

