

## **Plenary Panel Discussion**

### **Japanese Language Education: Creating the Future**

Edited by Robyn Spence-Brown

#### **Panel members**

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Mr **Matthew Absalom**, President, Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA); School of Languages and Linguistics, University of Melbourne

Ms **Anne de Kretser**, Director, Melbourne Centre for Japanese Language Education (MCJLE), Monash University

Ms **Kathe Kirby**, Executive Director, Asia Education Foundation (AEF)

Professor **Carolyn Stevens**, President (2011-2013), Japanese Studies Association of Australia (JSAA); Professor of Japanese Studies, Monash University

Professor **Chihiro Kinoshita Thomson**, Australian representative on J-GAP program and Japanese Global Network; Professor of Japanese Studies, School of Humanities and Languages, UNSW, Australia

Professor **Yasu-Hiko Tohsaku**, President, American Association of Teachers of Japanese; Professor of Development Studies, University of California, San Diego

Professor **Kent Anderson**, Pro-Vice Chancellor (International), University of Adelaide

## Robyn Spence-Brown

The panel has been asked to address the following questions:

- What are the **strengths** of Japanese Language Education (JLE) in Australia and the **challenges** facing it?
- How can we build on strengths and address challenges to ensure it remains **strong** and **relevant**?
- How can we **promote the relevance** of JLE and **build demand** in schools, universities and the community more broadly?
- How can we **work together** across states, levels of education, and internationally to build for the future?

I've asked each of the speakers to speak for six minutes or so about one or two aspects of these questions that they think are important, from different perspectives. Then, when they've all had their say, we're going to open it up for the panel to pick up on points that have been raised, and get into more of a discussion. I'd like to ask Kathe Kirby, Executive Director of the Asia Education Foundation (AEF), to start.

## Kathe Kirby

I want to focus my five minutes worth of comments today on the issue of building demand for Japanese language learning in Australian schools. I've chosen that topic because I wanted to draw on a report that the Asia Education Foundation published in June this year (2012) called "What Works: Building Demand for Asia Literacy", so my early comments are going to be focused on a combination of what works at building demand for languages education in general, for Asian languages and then finishing with Japanese.

I think all of us here are well-versed in the fact that building demand for languages is as critical an area for investment as providing the supply of teachers and high quality programs. We know that. We've known that for a long time, but I don't think that we've developed much of an evidence base to actually tell us what works at building demand. When we started this research project, we asked these sorts of questions: "What influences a primary school principal to support the choice of one language over another or any language?", "What influences a school community to support the choice of one language over another?", "What arguments work best with a largely monolingual Australian community?". Well, things like the White Paper on Australia in the Asian

Century make a difference to the community's views about the importance of learning languages. "What influences a Year 7 student to choose Japanese over, say, Chinese or French?", "What strategies influence a year nine student to continue their Japanese language?", "What arguments and incentives are successful for Year 10 and 11 students to continue on with their studies into Year 12 and then on to university?"

The point that I want to make here is that we know that building demand for languages learning, for Asian languages, for Japanese language, is a complex task that does not have one single answer. The arguments that we might put to children in primary school, in Year 7, in Year 9, in Year 10 or 11, are quite different arguments and I don't think we've recognised that nearly enough. And in fact, we might've done an analysis of many of the strategies around the country that were funded through the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools program on building demand; many of them have had a fairly narrow focus and they've often had a focus on just the vocational reasons for learning a language. And I don't know how many times people have suggested to me, "Well, if they just waived HECS, then students will do a language at Year 12." We don't have any evidence to support that.

What's really my point today is the need to know more about this area and to gather evidence. There are lots of things we do know, and we've known them for some time: we know that a powerful driver of demand in students to continue with their language studies is having a sense of purpose. We know that that purpose is really supported when the whole school is commissioned, when there are studies of countries where that language is spoken embedded across the curriculum, when the school community values and celebrates the languages taught in the school. We know, and our report absolutely validates this, that personal encounter is one of the strongest drivers of demand for school principals and teachers and members of the community, perhaps in hosting visitors from a language target country. We know that parents play a critical role in supporting school language choice and in fact, that's one of the things that our report has emphasised.

We collected 26 case studies of what's working around the country to build demand. We didn't want to accept the case studies unless they had a report, an evaluation or data to prove that their strategy was being effective, and one of the key overview messages that comes through is the importance of having parents on side. But think about this: how many strategies at a system level have there been to educate parents about Japanese language or the value of languages learning in general? What role does policy play in speaking to parents? What role does leadership from politicians and from education leaders have? And of course we know that a powerful driver of demand is high quality teaching, at all levels of school, of course, but vital to keep students engaged in the

primary years, in transition to Year 7 and again in early secondary school, where our data shows that the influence of friends, the power of the teacher and the timetable most drive the demand to continue on with language study. But we also know that no matter how high quality the teaching is, that we're often coming up against structural impediments that have been put in place to hold us back, to create barriers; we know what those structural impediments are. One of them, of course, is pathways between primary and secondary school, the opportunity for students to have continuous language learning. One of them is Year 12 assessment procedures, and another one is the vital need for increased time on task.

We've actually known about these impediments for a long time. All of these factors, from high-quality teaching to personal encounter and purpose, the removal of structural impediments right down to political and community support, drive demand for Asian languages and Japanese language in Australian schools, singly and together. I don't think we've recognised the depth of what's required. Joe Lo Bianco often talks about the 67 plus reports that have been undertaken into languages education in the last 30 or 40 years in this country, so nothing that I've said to you today will shock you, but little has been done at the systemic level to address these issues.

I really picked up, as all of you would, the important objective in the White Paper announcement, that all Australian children will have access to continuous language learning from primary school through to secondary, thereby setting in place the importance of doing something about language pathways.

The fact that little has been done and languages have remained largely optional in Australian school education has made languages absolutely vulnerable to the issue of demand. Maths teachers don't talk about driving demand; English teachers don't talk about the need to drive demand. It's largely a conversation in languages education and perhaps in the arts and some other areas. Perhaps the White Paper's objective that every child will have continuous access to learning a language will go towards rectifying that.

My second last point is that too little research has been done in this area to know what is working. Our report includes a literature review; we sent the researchers back four times, we said there must be things there, there must be more literature that's been done on this issue of what arguments work with kids at primary, higher, lower secondary, upper school, the community, parents, principals, what strategies are working to build those continuous pathways.

So my final point is this (and I think that this creates a real challenge for Japanese language education going forward): we also need to focus, as well as those macro issues, which I've just briefly gone through, all of us here, need to challenge on what are the strategies that will build demand for Japanese language education, specifically?

The really wonderful report on Japanese language education in Australian schools undertaken by Robyn Spence-Brown and Anne de Kretser (drawn on) in the *Four languages, four stories* report, emphasised that a one-size-fits-all approach to Asian languages in Australian schools doesn't work. We have to know, what are the arguments that are going to specifically speak to that primary school principal, that are going to specifically speak to parents and to children at those different levels of schooling, to encourage them to continue on with their Japanese language education?

And we have a challenge here; and that challenge (apart from some of the things I've mentioned) is the growing profile of China in Australia, and that's one of the languages that is on the tip of everyone's tongues: "We must be learning more Mandarin". And yet, Japanese has the most long-term and largest footprint in our schools and we need to build on the strength of that. So that's really the challenge that I'm going to leave here with you today: Is the argument for learning Japanese being lost in the community and what are we going to need to do to specifically address some of the issues that are just briefly outlined and identified today in regard to Japanese language learning in our schools? Thank you.

### **Robyn Spence-Brown**

Chihiro Thomson, from UNSW, will focus on a tertiary perspective on some of these issues.

### **Chihiro Kinoshita Thomson**

Kathe talked about building demand in the school sector. I'd like to make some comments on building demand in the tertiary sector.

I think in the tertiary sector, student enrolment is still very strong in Japanese; however, there is a demand which is not yet harvested due to mostly structural issues. Some university students are not taking up Japanese, or for that matter, any languages, or continuing with Japanese not because they don't want to, but because they cannot or they don't think they can or because they don't know how.

Professor Lo Bianco talked about this morning what he called the “waverer”, who is neither committed nor totally uninterested, and I think this is where we can build demand. When a high school leaver comes to the university, say this person is interested in doing an Engineering degree, he would go to an Engineering Faculty student centre. But the Engineering Faculty student centre will not tell him how to do a language within the university structure. We need to have better communication between us; people from Arts faculties or other faculties who are offering Japanese and places like the Engineering Faculty student centre, as well as high school teachers or career advisers who’d advise this person where to go, how to find Japanese courses.

Non-Arts degrees, such as Engineering, Architecture, Medicine, etc., make it very difficult to continue with Japanese or take up Japanese as a major. I’ve done a very small survey at the UNSW, that’s my university, and I’ve found that there is no single program in the University of New South Wales that does not allow a language to be taken. It might just be a single subject, but most likely, you are allowed to take up to six subjects in Japanese or another language. That means you can do a three-year long, continuous study of language, if you have the will to find it, and I think it’s probably similar in other universities: if you are committed, you can find a way to do a language.

And also, when you come to a university as a first-year student, you don’t know the way around, and the time goes very quickly and you’ll be a second-year, third-year or fourth-year student and you think, “Oh, maybe I can take Japanese as an elective,” and they do. Many of the first-year students in my course are Engineering students who are in their third or fourth year. They like the Japanese course very much but next year, they are graduating; it’s too late.

So those are the structural issues within the university, and we need everybody’s help to inform our students or other administrators, to make it more visible in the university system for high school leavers or new students of Japanese to find a way to do Japanese, even if they are not majoring in Japanese.

Another point I want to make is that there is not enough incentive to start or continue with Japanese in the university system. Victoria is blessed with a bonus point system (for university entrance), however in New South Wales, in my university, only those who are going into the Arts degree would receive bonus points for doing a language. I think we should inform university decision-makers of information, such as that US universities require a foreign language for admission. For example at Harvard, they recommend four years of language study before being admitted; Stanford, three or more years; UCLA, two years required and three years recommended. This is for admission, and many top US universities require foreign language courses to be taken during their

degrees. For example, Columbia requires at least intermediate level proficiency; Yale, at least three courses; Duke, at least three courses. We need collaborative effort among faculties within a university, we need collaborative effort between the university sector and high school sector, and we need collaborative effort among universities so that we can build more demand within the university.

### **Robyn Spence-Brown**

And now Anne de Kretser, Director of the Melbourne Centre for Japanese Language Education (MCJLE), will share some ideas.

### **Anne de Kretser**

My work involves predominantly primary and secondary schools so I'm going to talk about those sectors. I'm going to talk about two things today and the first is to make the point that we are doing well and Japanese is doing considerably well. We are doing a very good job.

When Robyn and I interviewed a lot of people for the report that we wrote, one message that came through was, "Why are we worried about Japanese? Japanese is fine." Even though, after the boom in the '80s and '90s we had the bust, we have survived and Japanese is still very strong in Australia. So when we interviewed people, that's why they were wondering why we were concerned about Japanese. However, even though we've remained fairly strong, we have to keep evolving. And Japanese teachers have been expert in doing that. We've adapted, we have changed. We can't, perhaps, rely as much on the rhetoric that was used about students needing to learn Japanese because it would help them get a job. So we have adapted.

Tohsaku-sensei talked about culture and how important that was, and that's one of the things that Japanese teachers have been—very expertly, I think—able to help their students with: learning language and culture together. That's been one of our strengths. Having pop culture now—and I notice that even on Sunday mornings when Rage used to be on—now it's Asian pop instead. Pop culture, the digital age, that exchange that we have, are all very important to us.

But importantly, I think Japanese teachers have embraced and used the personal touch to their advantage. Sister school exchanges, language assistants coming into the school: that personal exchange cannot be underestimated, and those personal exchanges make the language real for the students and I think that has been an ongoing strength of ours.

However, we do have challenges as well, and as the public discussion around Chinese (Mandarin) has increased, the discussion about Japanese may have become less visible. That's an ongoing challenge for us, as Kathe said, and it's something that we, as teachers, need to be very, very aware of, but also very proactive, in making sure that our voice is heard. Today is a great example that we have a lot of voices and that we need to use them.

There was an interesting study done through the University of South Australia a few years ago, interviewing students who were learning a language. And when they asked the students, "Why should you learn a language?" the students said, "I'm a global citizen. It'll help me get a job and I think it will be good for my future." When they asked them, "Why are you studying a language?" they said, "I enjoy it. I'm good at it, and I like my teacher."

Sometimes the messages that we convey are not always the ones that resonate with the students. And I think Kathe is exactly right. Some of the messages that are going out may not really be that important to a Grade 4 student or even a Year 7 student. So we have to be very careful, but also very strategic, about those messages that we give.

Through my work at the Melbourne Centre for Japanese Language Education, I often got calls in the past from teachers asking me to ring their principal and convince them that the Japanese program is worthwhile. In the last two years, I've had numerous calls from principals asking me to come and speak to the staff to help them understand how important the Japanese program is. That's been a really big turnaround, and I think that that's a great turnaround.

I mentioned this morning that we have a principal at this conference; we also have classroom teachers, classroom teachers who are trying to use Japanese in their class. So they're supporting Japanese in their school. So Japanese isn't a specialist subject, it has become a mainstream subject, and the students see their Japanese teacher using Japanese outside of the classroom, conversing with other teachers. They see those other teachers using Japanese where they can in their class. It doesn't have to be a huge amount, it's that the students see that it's a more mainstream thing than a specialist thing and therefore that message that Japanese is too hard or it's too difficult, or the poor children can't cope, that sort of action actually helps to make sure that that message is not being sent.

The other thing that I really would like you to think about is that in secondary schools, the message that often is given to students is: "If you don't go all the way, don't go at all." They're only talking about the end product: Year 12. "How many students do we have going through Year 12?" I know it's a numbers game in your schools but when we only talk to students about success of language learning in terms of finishing Year 12, then I think we are losing students who might stay with us longer.



RMIT did a pilot program called VET in Schools, and they actually offer the students a certificate, a vocational Certificate II in Languages, in Japanese. And they offered it to schools where they were losing students after the post-compulsory years, or in schools where students generally did not show a great interest in learning Japanese. Having the students being able to actually accomplish a certificate at a midway point, after Year 9, and in some cases Year 10; actually being able to say, “I studied Japanese ’til Year 10 and I have a qualification. I have a certificate that says I achieved this much,” was a very powerful thing in those pilot schools. The numbers of students retained increased and interestingly, some of the students who decided they weren’t going to continue, after getting that qualification, decided, “You know what? I am going to continue.” I think that we need to start looking at acknowledging students’ language level at other points, not just at the end of the game.

With my work, I’ve travelled to particularly South Australia and Tasmania and worked within Australia, and I see—and Robyn and I saw this through our report as well—teachers involved in the Japanese Language Teachers’ Associations (JLTA) working so hard to provide professional development for their teacher body. They work very hard to keep their teachers networked and connected. They’re all doing amazing work, but we don’t share that work. There are innovative programs, there are fantastic processes, there are incredible teachers doing amazing things, and in their network or in their state, they are able to support one another. But we are not sharing that in a bigger way. And one of the things that MCJLE, and I hope The Japan Foundation, are going to work on is actually bringing those JLTAs together to ensure that there’s a stronger body and that we work more closely together, sharing that information and making sure that information and knowledge is shared amongst us. We are living in the digital age and that sort of thing is much, much more easily done these days. So that’s where we’re heading, I hope, in the future. Thank you.

### **Robyn Spence-Brown**

Now I’d like to invite Carolyn Stevens, President of the Japanese Studies Association of Australia (JSAA), to speak.

### **Carolyn Stevens**

As the current president of the JSAA, sadly, one of the tasks I’m called upon to perform is writing letters of support to the university, usually senior managers, on behalf of Japanese language programs that are under threat of downsizing or even closure. This trend is despite the clearly recognised need for, and promises of support for, Asian

literacy in Australia, as per the White Paper released last Sunday. Thankfully, at least to the Federal Government, Asian engagement seems to be important.

So then, why this constant sense of threat? Why is it that we feel the need to quote, “Tame the tiger,” as Joe (Lo Bianco) noted this morning? In his keynote, he described an uneasy relationship between knowledge, which is what we do, and power, which is what they do, as outlined in policy. This uncertain and uneasy relationship is at the heart of this sense of insecurity. And I think I speak for many here when I say that oftentimes it seems as if teachers, whatever the level of schooling, end up creating knowledge in spite of the support, or lack thereof, of policy or (those in) power. Policy takes a fairly narrow focus on the vocational aspect of studying language, at any level, but I’m particularly talking about university.

This is problematic because it separates language from the rest of the academic curriculum as somehow different or special; an extra add-on. And unfortunately, this often results in a subordinate status. This is the tension quoted from Joe’s book from 2009: “[a] tension between the view that we have language provision serving economic and employment ends versus serving the ends of social justice, educational access and personal satisfaction”. The problem is, if we barter with the “tigers” using the currency they value, we too end up focusing on the economic and employment ends of our discipline and make ourselves even more vulnerable to the ebb and flow of supply and demand. Despite the government calls for continuous support, if there is falling demand, there is little realisation of policy support from our heads of schools, deans and vice chancellors.

With the rise of China, students as well as administrators, turn their interests to Chinese. Others have their eyes on South America and are supporting Spanish. We are told that the economic rise of China and India has encouraged university students to study these languages, and therefore, we learn that Japan has to contract if China is to grow. This neo-liberalist view of Asian literacy hurts not only just the area specialists who are not included in the flavour of the month menu, but it also endangers those who are chosen, for when supply and demand principles drive education, everyone runs the risk of vulnerability.

I would like to see teachers of Japanese at both the secondary and the tertiary levels promote the study of Japanese in non-instrumentalist ways as well. As Kathe pointed out, let’s project ourselves as the teachers do in Maths and in English. Project that image, and the reception will follow.

But this situation is not limited just to Australia. The Modern Language Association, which is the peak academic body for the teaching of foreign languages at universities in the United States, wrote in 2007:

In the context of globalisation and the post-9/11 environment, the usefulness of studying languages other than English is no longer contested. The goals and the means of language study, however, continue to be hotly debated. On the one end, it is considered to be principally instrumental, a skill to use in communicating thought and information. At the opposite end, language is understood as an essential element of a human being's thought processes, perceptions and self-expressions. (MLA 2007)

In light of the [*Australia in the Asian Century* report, which] I would consider fairly instrumentalist, we also have to argue a further case, that of the intellectual value of studying Japanese and how the study of Japanese enhances and deepens our understandings of ourselves and others in exactly the same way that the study of History or Philosophy does. We want to take advantage of the current political and economic climate that prioritises Asian literacy for economic growth and employment opportunities, but we must not rest on the White Paper's instrumentalist support. Regardless of the cheerleading in Canberra, those of us in any form of education, whether it's tertiary, primary or secondary, are vulnerable to administrators who follow numbers. We must present our discipline as an intellectually vital area, and the activities of the MCJLE and also my organisation, the JSAA, are crucial in supporting this.

My organisation sponsors activities such as a biannual conference. We have a newly formalised annual symposium grant program and we also publish an ERA A-ranked journal *Japanese studies* published by Routledge in the UK. These are all ways the JSAA supports teachers of Japanese at all levels in ways that are recognised by the workplace managers who are following numbers, but are also intellectually viable. While many of you here are already members, I call on the others to join, and those who are already members to engage with the association's activities more regularly. I think the JSAA can assist with this project, moving away from instrumentalism and towards intellectual vitality through its activities. One of my main goals is to show the monolingual leaders at the top that the study of Japanese is not merely a trend to rise or to fall, but an academic area with intellectual as well as strategic benefits.

## **Robyn Spence-Brown**

Now I'd like to hand over to Matthew Absalom, president of the Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations (AFMLTA).

## **Matthew Absalom**

It's fantastic to see you all here today and congratulations on a very interesting program.

I want to talk a little bit about some of my own work. I'm a linguist and a language teacher. I teach Italian, but I'm here in my role as the president of the AFMLTA. I did a little study on motivation a couple of years ago, looking at why first-year university students have continued or dropped the language during their second years. I pulled out the students that kept going with Japanese to the end of Year 12, and the statistic that stood out was the importance of teachers, and this point's already been made. It looks like only a subtle difference, but statistically, actually that's significant. Everything else, you can see the factors there (*referring to Powerpoint slide*): travel, culture, future employment, teachers and entertainment. And then you see things such as strategic Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) scores. I also want to note that, by the end of school, parents have moved out of the equation, actually. If we look at motivational studies in junior secondary, parents are a big thing. By the end of school, it's not the parents anymore. If anything, it might be students' peers. But by the end of school, students have become people. They're a little bit more independent, they make their own decisions. So that's something to think about.

Here's a quote: "Japanese was a much more interesting experience than French at senior level and the teacher seemed much more interested and knowledgeable." And this comment's been made before. Actually in Australia, we've got an expert body of Japanese language teachers and that's a strength that really needs to be maximised.

I just want to talk about Japanese more widely. Japanese is a little bit of an anomaly in Australia. If you think about the language, and if you think about the other languages that we teach here, the perceptions are different. If we pick out other languages, people will say "French is music" or "Indonesian's easy". Italian: "all the Latin lovers". What do people say about Japanese? It doesn't have—there isn't a "hanger" like that. There isn't a, "I'm doing Japanese because..." Okay, people say "anime" and all of that, but I'm not convinced that's the thing. But just think about that a little bit.

It's not a community language because there haven't been waves of immigration. So Japanese doesn't have the community language status that other languages have. It's not necessarily a language for business anymore. Everyone's talking about Chinese now. It's not spoken widely. It's not a mass language. It's not like Spanish, Arabic. It's not a language of colonialism. And people say it's not easy. The thing about "easy" though, look, seriously, nothing's easy, actually. I mean, anything that's valuable isn't easy. And as languages educators, we shouldn't fall into the trap of saying, "It's hard," because everything's hard. It's hard to write a critical essay. It's hard to learn a musical instrument. It's hard to drive a car. It's hard to get the pasta just right.

I think the other important thing I'd like to talk about is branding. This is my point. Rethink the message. What's the message? Think about the message. Japanese clearly has a special place in the heart and minds of countless Australians, otherwise it wouldn't have the strength that it's got in education. That's something really, really important for you to bear in mind. People have fond memories of learning Japanese. They don't have the horror of, "My Latin teacher was this," or, "French was hideous, Madame was—" you know, whatever. We don't have those stories around Japanese, which is something to really build on. There are clear special relationships between Australia and Japan. When I was doing a bit of research, you know, apparently the best buckwheat soba noodles are from Tasmania? You know that old adage about getting to people through their stomach.

I think a good way to think about Japanese is as a gateway language. We have to be a little bit more collaborative in languages and a little bit less competitive and combative. It's nice if people can use Japanese to move on to Korean or whatever it is. And we should actually be happy with that and not going, "Oh, no. Keep doing Japanese." Intellectual and chic and an achievement. They're three things that I want you to think about around Japanese. Intellectual, as my colleague just said. Japan is, from a design point of view, from a fashion point of view, to look at—aesthetically very pleasing. Something to bear in mind. We're talking about adolescents. They like the way things look. They like fads.

I think it's good to think about what's easy as well. I'm a phonologist. Japanese is phonologically a very accessible language. Same vowel system as Spanish, Indonesian. Not difficult syllabic structure. From a pronunciation, from a phonological production point of view, it's actually quite accessible.

And the people side of it, we've heard about it today. We've got connections. Increasingly, I'm talking about language learning as about people. If we make it all about books and whatever, that'll appeal to that nerd that likes books, but the 99% of the rest of your students are interested, actually, in interacting with people. Working together; last point. As I've said already, within languages, we're our own worst enemies. We look at

each other and go, “Oh, no. They’ve got a few of my students. They should have kept doing Italian. Why did they move to Japanese?” We’ve got to move on from this, we’ve got to move away from it. We’ve got to think as a field. We’ve got to think as “languages”. We’ve got to think of each other, not being divided and conquered. We have to learn from each other.

The AFMLTA National Conference 2013 will be a fabulous opportunity to learn from one another. The AFMLTA, what do we do? We do some national projects—we’re looking at building capacity. One of our recent ones has been mentoring leadership. You can find this on our website. We’re putting up examples of practice at the moment. We need better research, we’ve heard that already. We need to know what works. (You can see we’re all on the same page up here.) We need to know why people choose Japanese. Why? Because it’s unclear to me why students choose Japanese. We need to know why. We need better collaboration. AFMLTA, MLTAs, JSAA, we’ve got representatives of universities here. Schools; get some research happening in your schools. Do it yourself. It’s easy to do research in your schools. If you want some suggestions, contact any of us. We’ll help you out. I’ll come to your school and help you, wherever it is. But get some research going. Work out for yourselves what’s going on.

And don’t let this moment slip away. We’ve got our moment now. Everyone’s always seeing those moments, this is a good moment. And think about quality. What do we want for our students? What do the students want? Have you asked them? And that’s where I’m going to finish.

### **Robyn Spence-Brown**

Now, it’s over to Professor Kent Anderson, who has just arrived from the airport.

### **Kent Anderson**

どうも、こんにちは。本当に遅れまして申し訳ありません。アデレード大学のケント・アンダーソンと申します。今日、日本語で発表するか英語で発表するか、本当に迷っていたんですけども、ジョー・ロビアンコ先生と話していたとき、「ケントでは絶対に5分以内で報告はできない！」と言われたので、早口で話すために英語で発表させていただきます。

So I started in Japanese to tie in two things, to make two points. One, is I’m one of those evil administrators that you’ve heard about. Some of us evil administrators speak Japanese, speak foreign languages, and believe deeply and passionately about the

importance of language. You have allies that you don't know about who are there, who will come. And we've seen that again and again. So it's not as bleak as we sometimes think it is and that is my punch line for today. I only have five minutes, but my message is a very simple one: "the power of the positive"—the power of the positive message.

The second reason that I started off in Japanese is I love to tell stories, so let me start off with a story of mine. I took French in Years 6, 7 and 8 because I was a student in the United States and in order to go to university, you had to do a language. And I failed. Having failed at French before I got to the point where you can get into university, I took German for Years 9, 10 and 11, and I failed. I got into university somehow and there decided, "Well, shoot. I'd better do something," and so I started to study Japanese. And well, my Japanese is not perfect; but I can get by enough to do things. The point of that story is that on the back of those failures of French and German is the success of another language. So what I'm trying to suggest is we change the language, for example, on retention, not to talk about how we fail our students if they don't stay with us, but how we actually leave them prepared to succeed in not only learning another language but in hundreds and thousands of other ways. Connecting with people. And that is one of the things that I think the White Paper talks about very well.

Okay, so my message is again simple: the power of the positive. There are two aspects to that. The first is the negative is lazy, intellectually lazy, and I think a scapegoat for too much. It is hard to change. It is easy to retain the status quo. Therefore, given the two options, we will do nothing. Negative is easy for evil administrators to ride. The positive is something that they want to do, but given no option, like the vacuum, they will go into the negative space.

The second is, the positive is powerful. If you don't try something, of course you won't achieve anything. So first is the willingness to try, and being positive. And I want to repeat what others have already said, there should be no excuses for something being hard. Everything in life that is worthwhile is hard. Don't use "hard" as a negative. Hard is a positive that builds resilience, that builds humanity, and that builds powerful relationships. And those are the challenges. I was rewriting a speech of the Vice Chancellor's today. I took out "problems" and I put in "challenges". Those are the challenges that present us. And then, whether you believe the research or not, there is this concept of the power of positive thinking and positive psychology.

Okay, if you have come with me this far and you believe in this power of the positive, I think there are two aspects, or two ways I want to think about it. One is around learning. The message that this is the hardest language; the message that most people never get to fluency; the message that we have dropouts; the message that our retention rates are not

as high as we want, are negative messages which make the cause harder. Turning that into the positive, which is how we prepare people for those future successes, I think is easier to get people on board with.

The second one is about the politics, or the public policy as Joe (Lo Bianco) would talk about. Let me focus on three things here. The first is, why Japan? So much of our time now is talking about the negative of Japan. The lost decades. Why Japan? I want to get beyond that. Japan (I like this idea of rebranding) is sexy. Japan has the strongest teaching infrastructure of any language. You guys are the best. This is the model for the rest of the world. So get out of the conversation, of the rhetoric, of deficit, and move to how strong we are. The same with the White Paper. No one actually debates what the White Paper is arguing, which is, the gravity has shifted and we need to prepare. All of the debate, all of the negativity is over: do we put in ten thousand dollars or ten billion dollars? I mean, that's a pretty positive conversation to be having. Let's turn it into the positive. And finally, the challenges in schools. I've been there, I've been to your schools, my son's in your schools, I've taught in the schools; I know it is challenging. I know doing that day in and day out, you can get frustrated and you can fall into the rhetoric of the negative, but it's actually the positive that will bring us along. It's the positive that the evil principals, it's the positive that the evil deans, it's the positive that the evil cheque writers, the politicians and the bureaucrats, want. Optimism sells. And we have something that this country needs and you are the best in the world at delivering it. Thank you very much.

### **Robyn Spence-Brown**

I've asked Professor Tohsaku to go last so that he can, with his critical eye, from an outsider's perspective, comment on some things he's observed since he's been here.

### **Yasu-Hiko Tohsaku**

Because I went through a very bad education system, I didn't develop well my critical thinking skills, and so I cannot be critical in that way, but I'd like to talk about the building of Japanese language education in Australia from a slightly different point of view.

As Chihiro-sensei said when she introduced me (*for the keynote address*), I am the first president of the American Association of Teachers of Japanese. This association started on January 1st this year. Before then, we had two organisations. One is ATJ, mainly consisting of university faculty members who are teaching Japanese language, Japanese literature. And another one is NCJLT, mostly comprising K through 12 teachers.



Before these two organisations merged, they hardly had a conversation between these two entities. Probably, the conversation started five or six years ago when we started developing national standards. That was the first time when I think university faculty members and K–12 teachers got to work together and discussed the streamlined program of Japanese language, and that was a really good opportunity for both the K through 12 teachers and university faculty members. And also we developed an advanced program, AP Japanese Language and Culture program, whereby high school students can take this university Japanese language course while in high school, and if they pass the exam, they can get college credit before coming into a college. In order to develop the AP program and exam, especially, high school teachers and university teachers come together to develop the program and test. During the course of this process, we have a conversation and we get to know each other. Before the introduction of the AP program, university faculty members didn't care about K through 12 programs. And K through 12 teachers were afraid of talking to us. But communication is really great. And I think it's important for K through 12 teachers and university faculty members to have a conversation, to sit together and to understand each other. This is really important for building a future of Japanese language education, I think in Australia too. And one good way to have this kind of conversation is to develop a well-articulated program. By not having a well-articulated program from kindergarten through to university, we waste a lot of money and time. And also, we cannot create highly proficient Japanese language speakers.

I often hear in the United States, “How many years do you have to study Japanese if you want to become proficient?” It's true, Japanese language is really difficult, but sometimes (it's not) because (it is) too hard, it's because we don't have well-articulated Japanese language programs from kindergarten through university, that students won't become more proficient in Japanese. So I think teachers from every entity, every sector, should get together and think about developing a well-articulated program from K through university. And also, we should not forget after university. I think we should think about Japanese language education from cradle to grave. Even after university, when education is over, people should use Japanese.

So developing life-long Japanese language speakers and users is really important. I was reading a newspaper article, actually *Nihon keizai shinbun*, the other day, and in that article, I don't mean to put down cab drivers, but a cab driver who had worked for a really famous, big corporation in Japan, he actually was in Southeast Asia, and when he returned to Japan from Southeast Asia, he was fired and he lost his job and he became a cab driver. And when someone interviewed this cab driver and asked “Why do you think you were fired?” he replied “Because I didn't have any professional skills.” I talked about twenty-first-century skills this morning, and in this article, this person who interviewed

this cab driver said, “In the twenty-first-century, having professional skills, perfect professional skills, is really important to survive.” So if you study Japanese, you should strive to become a really proficient speaker. There is a business book talking about *Ten thousand hours*; in order to become professionally skilful, you have to do something, one thing, for ten thousand hours. Ten thousand hours is just a figurative thing, but if you want to become more proficient in Japanese, you have to, although it’s hard, you should work really hard. And you should work from kindergarten through university and even after university is over, I think you should keep studying Japanese, and we should emphasise that. And, again, it’s up to you to create joy in learning Japanese.

And I know my time is up soon, but in order to build up the future Japanese education in Australia, you should constantly do leadership training. Leaders do not stay young forever. We need the next generation of leaders. The same is true in the United States. When I was approached by The Japan Foundation five years ago and asked “What is the priority for Japanese language education here?” I said, “Development of young leaders.” We won’t stay young forever, and we need, constantly need, the next generation of leaders, and I think the same is true with Australia.

And also lastly, I talked about advocacy and as you see from my talk, advocacy needs special skills. So in order to advocate for Japanese language education in Australia, I strongly suggest you have a workshop to train people for advocacy skills. Thank you.

### **Robyn Spence-Brown**

Now, I’d like to throw the floor open to the panel, to throw in those important comments you’ve missed or pick up on things that other people have said. Who would like to kick off?

### **Matthew Absalom**

I absolutely agree that we shouldn’t be justifying ourselves. I want to remind you that in every declaration for educational goals for young people—the three declarations: Darwin, Melbourne, Adelaide—languages has always been one of the key learning areas. We actually have to stop justifying ourselves.

But the point I want to make is actually about finding out why the students are doing it. Sometimes the curriculum documents tell us that the kids are doing it because they want to talk the language or, you know, they want to go buy one of your nice Japanese pancakes or something and they want to talk to the lady while they’re doing it. Some kids don’t want to, some kids want to read, some kids want to do something else. My

point is to find out why they're doing it so we can respond as educators, so we can go, "Oh, I've got a group of nerdy big heads here who want to read. Let's do some reading even though the curriculum doesn't tell us to", or "I've got the opposite, some illiterate fools who don't want to read." Let's emphasise another aspect of the language. That's my point about why they're doing it. I just want us to be able to be responsive and actually feel okay about going, "Hang on a minute, okay, I've got this curriculum thing here, but the kids want this (other thing). I know I can do it. I know their Japanese will improve through these activities. Let's give it a whirl."

### **Kent Anderson**

I hadn't thought about Matthew's suggestion of brand until he made it. I think it's an excellent one. Let me encourage one thing which is, we don't have to wait for Japan to figure out what Japan's brand is, and fall on the back of that. This is Japanese for Australia, and that can be different, and indeed we might even lead Japan in this.

The second point is, tagging on to the end of this conversation we were just having right now, when you go into a branding exercise, you are not just saying, "What do the clients want?" you are also saying, "Who do I want to be?" So, I'm not in favour of just 100% giving up who we are to wherever the students might be at this time. I want to take a bit of responsibility for who we are as well. But I think the brand is a wonderful idea for JSAA or for one of those others. Also, I might plug Languages and Cultures Network for Australian Universities (LCNAU) Languages Communities; for the university teachers here, please join in this advocacy.

### **Chihiro Kinoshita Thomson**

Taking on the branding idea, I think if we let the students do the choosing it'll work. And just to look back at my last semester, our students did some presentations on their own chosen topics and one was "maid cafes" and a second was, "Why is it that Japanese idols don't sell in Australia?" And those topics came along with "Why is the Japanese suicide rate so high?". So, you know, let the students choose what they want to learn and it will work. And also our Australian students have different types of consuming life. They use Hello Kitty stationery goods and they aspire to buy Shiseido Cosmetics, even though they are so expensive and they can't afford it, and they eat sushi every day. We don't have to sell Japan too much, they already own their own Japan. Let the students do their own talking, I think it will be alright. And after listening to Tohsaku-sensei's talk this afternoon, and I've known Tohsaku-sensei for many years, I have taken his advice and I want to do some self-promotion, and I'd like to encourage you to do more self-promotion.

This year at UNSW we have focussed on advocacy. One of the advocacy strategies was, we applied for the Office of Learning and Teaching citation for an outstanding contribution to student learning, and we were awarded that, along with \$10,000 dollars. You know, being humble is Japanese, I know self-promotion is not very Japanese-y, but we need to do it and I'm sure there are many more deserving teams and individuals here who'd deserve this award much more than us, but we did it and that's why we got it. We need to do it and I encourage all of you to apply for awards.

### **Kathe Kirby**

I wanted to pick up on something that Anne de Kretser has said and link her to the obvious enthusiasm for the number of associations that have been talked about during the panel discussion. Anne made a point about sharing good practice, and if there's one thing that the AEF learned through the report we did into what's working to build demand, it's that if we do share practice, we're sharing good practice and that it's really powerful. One of the profiles we did was a program happening in New South Wales independent schools where they actually were teaching parents at primary schools the language that the primary school was teaching, so parents were able to come in for half an hour a couple of times a week and had a go at learning Japanese or Chinese. This had a really powerful effect on the parents. And the parents all of a sudden say, "Oh now we get it! Oh this is fun! We're going to really support this." I'm using that as an example, when you share that practice, when you say, "Here are some schools in New South Wales doing this, why couldn't schools everywhere be doing this?" So it's a way to bring the parent community in. And I think that with the rich and live associations that you've got, one of the real challenges is utilising the technologies that there are today. How are you going to really build on sharing good practice and sharing what's working? Because everybody in this room has strategies that they know work really well. So I just urge you to think about that.

### **Robyn Spence-Brown**

Thank you very much to all the panellists, for giving us such rich ideas in a very short period of time: Very important ideas about how to connect and how to advocate for Japanese—and a lot of challenges. That's why we invited them, because just as Jo Lo Bianco said about our expectations for students, we have very high expectations for the Japanese community. We feel very privileged to have had you here. Thank you for starting many conversations for us.