

45 Minutes per Week

How the Australian Curriculum is working in a Government Primary School

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Introduction

Most government primary schools have limited time for ‘specialist’ classes such as Japanese Second Language classes, which means that primary Japanese teachers are required to cover aspects of the Australian Curriculum and meet all Achievement Standards within a very limited time frame. Based on *Implications for teaching, assessment and reporting - Australian Curriculum: Languages*, the curriculum is written for 350 hours from Foundation to Year 6, or 1.25 hours per week. According to a survey undertaken by the Japanese Language Teachers Association of Victoria (JLTAV) in 2008, the majority of primary schools have between 30 and 60 minutes per week allocated to Japanese. At Gardenvale Primary School (GPS), the classes are 50 minutes per week. Effective classroom time is reduced to 40-45 minutes, however, for senior classes (Years 3-6) who must walk 250 metres from their campus to the Junior Campus where these classes are held. In addition to the relatively short class time, many primary language teachers experience significant interruptions to their programs from extra-curricular activities such as year-level camps, Bike-Ed (Year 5 students undertake one full week of activities focusing on bicycle education), incursions and school photographs.

To maintain a rigorous program and ensure ongoing student achievement, it is necessary to re-think the ‘normal’ structure of a curriculum and re-imagine the scope and sequence to overcome such hurdles.

Scope and Sequence

The scope and sequence for a primary school differs from that at a secondary school. Where most secondary textbooks align with curriculum outcomes and provide scope and sequence within the structure of the textbook, primary language programs are generally created by the language teacher and rely more on the school curriculum guidelines (e.g. integrated curriculum focus) and the sequence outlined in each state’s interpretation of the Australian Curriculum. The Australian Curriculum provides a very sound starting point for primary schools to develop a sequence that works for the abilities of their students and the time they have available. At GPS we teach from Prep through to Year 6, and while the linguistic content is generally consistent, the topic and content can be easily changed according to the interests and overall ability of the cohort.

Authentic vs. Synthetic Texts

In the Scope and Sequence, there is a mix of both authentic Japanese texts (such as tongue twisters, songs, cafe menus, 絵本) and synthetic texts (created or modified specifically to suit language level of the students, such as translations of English Picture Books, weather reports, and instructions for *The Amazing Race*). In the earlier years, authentic Japanese texts targeting our students’ linguistic ability are quite relevant developmentally – that is, they are written for young children and therefore quite suitable to be used within the Early Years classroom. However, as students move through the school, the number of authentic texts that suit students both developmentally and linguistically diminishes significantly – texts are either too challenging or too babyish. It is for this reason that texts are often synthesised for higher primary students, either by re-creating a known English text in Japanese or by modifying the language in a Japanese text.

2017 Gardenvale Primary School Japanese –
Prep to Year 6 Scope and Sequence

	Semester 1	Semester 2
Prep	Greetings, colours, numbers Introduction to kanji Songs and てあそび Simple origami – classroom instructions Using adjectives	Read /write kanji 山川火水木林森 Sentence structure ～が好きです ～をたべます/ました Text focus – 尻尾の歌
Year 1	Kanji revision + new kanji Mini-beasts Making tables and Venn diagrams using Japanese Related origami	Animal focus こぶた / たぬき / きつね / ねこ Animal noises – Onomatopoeia Possessive の わたし/ぼくのペットは～です Read / write kanji 竹石犬馬大小上下中
Year 2	Songs and tongue twisters (すももももも) Hiragana in 10 weeks Hiragana games – reading familiar words – colours and shapes	Text focus – Brown Bear Reading hiragana words and phrases Verbs – present and past tense Particles は and を
Year 3	Hiragana revision – introduction of ten ten Text focus – One fish two fish Small animal counters Small つ	Text focus – Where is the Green sheep い and の adjectives (colours) Reading focus
Year 4	Time School – subjects and timetable Writing focus: ～ べんきょうします ～ が好きです。 Focus on furigana – blended sounds and extended vowels	Family – the river test Forms of address Song – わにのかぞく Text – 大きなカブ – (create and perform a play)
Year 5	Prepositions – kanji and furigana House – rooms and household items – cockroach game Sentence structure: ～の～に～ います/あります	Transport – particles で and に Sentence writing – The amazing race Fashion unit (short unit) clothing verbs Adjectives and nouns
Year 6	Pet café – menus – food adjectives Cup Noodles – make a commercial	Weather reports 今日の天気は～でしょう。 Temperature 最高/最低 気温は～でしょう。 End of year celebration – watch Japanese film

One benefit of using known English texts is that students are often already familiar with and have fond memories of the story (for example, well-known texts such as *The Diary of a Wombat*, or *One Fish Two Fish*) creating additional inbuilt supports for reading comprehension. A text does not just have to be a book in the primary classroom, but is often a song, tongue twister, video clip of a Japanese ad (such as the すしローCMs), a haiku or even a puppet or an image.

Kanji – then hiragana

At GPS, students are taught kanji in Prep and Year 1, and hiragana is then introduced from Grade 2. Our rationale for this is that students in Prep and Year 1 have not yet developed their phonemic awareness even in English. As a result, the hiragana seem like intangible squiggles to them, not connected to any sound or meaning that they know or understand. Kanji, on the other hand, seems tangible, even logical, and our children enjoy it. Many of the kanji are recognisable through their shape and, as they represent meaning rather than sound, it seems there are more connections for the students to make, which reinforces their understanding and memorisation. In addition, it enables us to introduce students to the concept of a symbol representing meaning—a great introduction to the learning of character languages.

When students are introduced to hiragana in Year 2, they have good phonemic awareness, and they have already acquired a significant vocabulary, so the symbols are quickly connected to known sounds and words and students become confident in their ability to recognise and read them. Once students have begun to learn hiragana, the shift is quickly made to reading whole words. Students are reminded that learning all the hiragana off by heart can be a challenge and that this is NOT their goal. They are required to find the information (using a hiragana chart or table) to be able to read, and they are expected to learn the words that are related to the text they are studying. This makes hiragana relevant and its acquisition more achievable for our students, and it reduces the likelihood of them disengaging due to the challenge of remembering 46 characters.

Whole-year breakdown of curriculum

Rather than a standard term-by-term curriculum, at GPS the curriculum is broken into short and long units within a semester. An example is below:

Semester outline

Term 1		Term 2
←→ short unit	←→ long unit	←→ short unit
Revise kanji/hiragana Cultural focus Set expectations	Major linguistic focus 10-12 week unit – begin with intensive oral/aural introduction Explicit character study (P-1 漢字, 2-6 ひらがな) Explicit grammar – particles, counters, verb conjugations Text study (picture book, song, tongue twister, video clip) Assessment	Games (applying new learning) Short unit (3-4 weeks) (report writing)

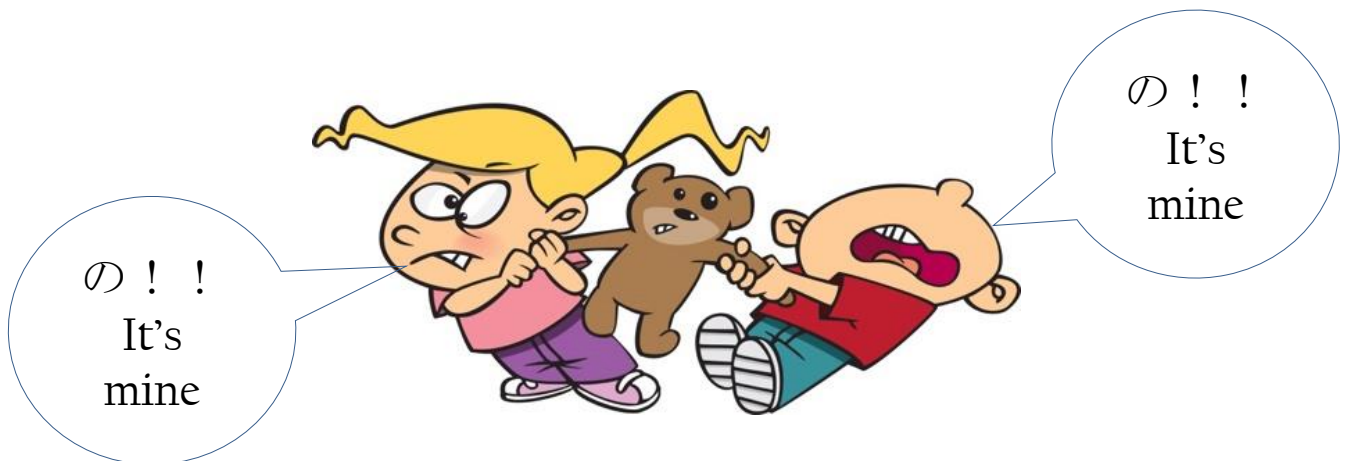
This type of planning allows learning to be continuous throughout the semester, anticipates the frequent interruptions that often occur within the first term, and takes into account the need to assess large numbers of students and write reports often well before the end of term 2. Through beginning the year with a short unit, students usually have a fun start to the language classes and are quickly engaged; then, once interruptions have lessened toward the end of term 1, they begin a more focused unit of learning with a positive attitude. This unit carries over from term 1 and is picked up quickly at the beginning of term 2, and the students are able to apply themselves fresh from the holidays. Assessment is usually completed by week 5, giving the teacher considerable time to make corrections and write informed and relevant reports for all students. At GPS there are in excess of 650 students, so assessment and reporting require a significant amount of time.

Short Units of Work

The outline above mentions short and long units of work. Short units refers to knowledge that does not require a full unit of work to teach. This may be because it is a very small piece of knowledge, or a word/phrase that will be used frequently and therefore will be learned through its use rather than requiring a formal lesson.

Examples of short units of work that are used in our classroom include:

- Colours – these are introduced quickly through a song, which is often repeated each week. In addition, tongue twisters such as 赤パジャマ、黄パジャマ、茶パジャマ and 赤まきがみ、青まきがみ、黄まきがみ further reinforce this learning, as well as the emphasis on colours within texts such as *Brown Bear* by Eric Carle, or *One Fish Two Fish* by Dr Seuss.
- Big numbers – ‘おくまんせんひゃくじゅういち’ – a great lead in to shopping units and a lot of fun for older students who like the challenge of figuring out how to read the numbers. This short unit includes students creating their own ‘rap’ version of a song using the word ‘okumansenhyakujuuichi’.
- Particles – such as the possessive ‘の’. This is introduced prior to the 鬼のパンツ song in Grade 2 through a very simple role play, where two people fight over one toy, stating over and over ‘の, it’s mine’.



- Tastes – おいしい、あまい、からい and すっぱい are introduced in Prep and then used to describe the morning snack each week. Introduced through mnemonic stories (e.g. My Grandma, Oi shi can cook!) and used weekly, these words and phrases become part of our functional language within the classroom.
- Furigana is introduced around Year 3 in conjunction with an introduction to counters. The students are already familiar with kanji and hiragana, and it is a natural progression to show them how they co-exist within a text to provide both meaning and pronunciation.
- います/あります is an important aspect of student understanding but does not require a long period of time to understand. Students learn quickly that there is a difference between the two, and spend a week or two discovering what belongs in each category. This is a fun unit of work as students bring in concepts such as bacteria, dust, and other tricky items to be classified. After this unit, the students can use both います and あります with confidence, clearly understanding the difference.

Long Units of Work

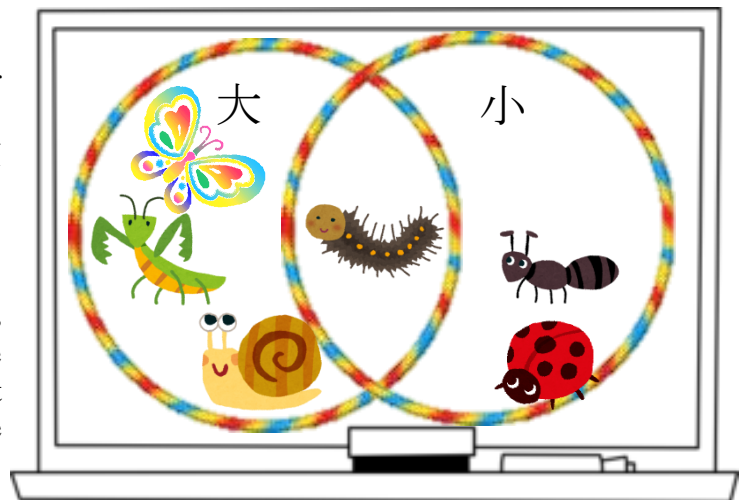
Long units of work generally are based on a text and include new character learning (hiragana, use of ten-ten, blends, writing in grids, etc), new grammar (particles, verb conjugation, sentence structure) and summative assessment. These long units start with an intensive aural/oral focus during which time students become familiar with the vocabulary and sentence structure that will be

introduced, and they often include a song to provide additional pronunciation support. The grammar is introduced early in the unit through a 'Grammar Hunt', where students are challenged to find patterns within the sentences for themselves and try to work out the rationale for these patterns. In allowing the students to discover their own grammatical understanding, this learning becomes much more powerful.

All character knowledge, grammar and particles are then explicitly taught with opportunities for students to seek clarification, so that before the text is introduced the students are confident in their understanding of the language. Throughout long units of work, students are constantly exposed to the words and sentences through flash cards, games such as karuta, word searches and other activities, and each lesson begins with a quick revision of the words and/or sounds and their rules.

Longer units that have worked well within our classroom have included:

- 鬼のパンツ
Introducing the possessive の
Cultural focus on 鬼
Describing using adjectives
Oral performance of the song 鬼のパンツ
Substituting words within a sentence structure: だれのパンツですか。～のパンツです。
- Minibeasts
Kanji 大 小
Classify insects according to their size/speed using a Venn diagram.
Using oral language to describe, e.g. 天道虫は早いです。カタツムリは大きいです。
- The Amazing Race
Based on the reality TV show, students learn the use of particles and sentence structure to obtain meaning from text and discover the race's ultimate destination.
Students use particles に and で with 行きます to re-create their own leg of the Amazing Race.
- The River Test



Based on the IQ test and introducing long vowel sounds, formal/informal forms of address, counters for people, using furigana, using と
Students have to solve the puzzle then describe the solution, first orally then in writing.

Expectations

There are a number of differing opinions about what is the optimal age for language learners, and around how we define the range of years that represents the Critical Period for language acquisition. There are few, however, who would doubt that young learners are very competent when it comes to acquiring a second language. This has implications for developing curriculum for primary students.

Rather than ‘dumbing down’ the linguistic goals, we need to recognise that younger students are capable language learners and this should be reflected in our expectations of the students’ second language acquisition.

Assessment

We find that one of the most challenging aspects of the primary language classroom is assessment and reporting. As suggested earlier, the program is structured in such a way that there is sufficient time to give assessment, complete corrections, and write the often 600+ reports prior to submission for proof reading, etc. Assessment itself also needs to be re-imagined to ensure ongoing formative and summative assessment are built into the short/long unit planning being described in this paper.

Formative assessment at GPS is built in to every lesson plan, from the flash cards at the beginning of the class to the games and team activities that form a significant part of the application of learning. Without ongoing formative assessment throughout each class, it would be very difficult to maintain expectations and engagement—one of the most motivating factors in our classroom is student achievement.

Summative assessment is more formally structured, and often comprises checklists and tick boxes. While it sounds quite daunting at times, it can really be quite simple. From Prep to Year 6, for example, students respond to the roll call in Japanese, and the question asked reflects the learning focus of that year level. Year 1 students (learning about taste and food) might be asked 『昨日の夜、何を食べましたか。』 and the student response develops over the course of the semester from 『～を食べました。』 to 『おいしいパスタとサラダと甘いアイスクリームを食べました。』 by the end of the unit of study. In this way, it is very simple and clear to see which students are able to understand the sentence structure, the word order, and the concept of substitution of vocabulary in order to create new sentences. In addition, the language they are using, while at times including English words where they do not have the Japanese equivalent, is very real and being used in a communicative way.

The use of pegs on clothes is another easy form of assessment of oral language and works particularly well in assessing classroom and functional language. Students are challenged to use the target phrase in context, and when this is done they are able to place the clothes peg back in the tub. This also allows students who are less confident to come up and speak quietly directly with the teacher to demonstrate their understanding, without an audience.

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While the Australian Curriculum is academically rigorous and sets the expectations of student learning quite high, it is achievable, even in one 45-minute class a week. And not only is it achievable, it can be fun. I encourage all teachers to re-think, re-structure and embrace the challenge of the Australian Curriculum, and be confident that it can be taught – even within the limits of the primary classroom.