

## **Towards effective advocacy – evaluation of the Nihongo Roadshow and the School Leader Fellowship Program**

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### **Introduction**

Australia has the fourth highest number of learners of Japanese in the world (Kokusai Kōryū Kikin, 2015), and Japanese is the most learned language in primary and secondary schools. However, in many regional areas there are very limited opportunities to connect with Japanese language and culture, and this can lead to Japanese language learners feeling disengaged from their learning.

Japan has recently been losing its economic power while China's presence has been expanding. This is reflected in the situation of Japanese language education in Australia, where stakeholders' interest in Asian languages has been shifting from Japanese to Chinese. Faced with this reality and with the decline in languages in schools in general, the Japan Foundation, Sydney (JFSYD) has come to recognise that advocacy for Japanese language education is critical, and has implemented two programs, the Nihongo Roadshow and the School Leader Fellowship Program.

This paper reports on these programs and on their influence on students and the school community. It then presents the results of a survey of teachers from various states on the most effective ways to advocate Japanese, and considers how to formulate future advocacy.

### **Nihongo Roadshow**

#### **Outline**

The Nihongo Roadshow is a program which integrates a quiz day for students, a professional development (PD) session for teachers, a film night for both students and parents and a meeting with school principals. The aim of this event is not just to entertain students and parents with quizzes or film screenings, but to offer opportunities to connect with authentic Japanese language and culture and to advocate Japanese learning. JFSYD has conducted the Roadshow in eight cities in three states. Table 1 below shows the participation levels that were achieved.

#### *Quiz Day*

The quiz day participants were primary and secondary students. A total of 1217 students from 57 schools in three states participated in the quiz days. The quiz questions reflected the aims of the Australian Curriculum and of language learning in general, and the quiz was conducted in a combination of English and Japanese, adjusting to the level of the students. Between the quiz rounds students participated in cultural activities such as the chopstick challenge and the kendama relay.

*Film Night*

A film night was held for students and parents, and before the screening we gave a short information session to parents on ‘Why learn Japanese?’, where we explained the benefits of learning languages and of learning Japanese in particular. We also handed out the advocacy flyer produced by the Japanese Language Teachers’ Association of Victoria (JLTAV) which gives information on how parents can support children in learning Japanese.

*Meeting with principals (Tasmania only)*

Principals from the host schools were invited to the quiz day, and a meeting between the principal and the JF staff was planned. Unfortunately, due to the principals’ busy schedules, only one principal was able to participate in the in-depth meeting. (As a result we decided not to schedule a principal’s meeting at the following Roadshow events and to consider other ways of advocating to the principal.)

In the meeting we gave the principal information about JFSYD grant programs and PD for teachers. We also explained the situation of Japanese language education in Australia, emphasizing that the quality of Japanese teachers is high and that there is generally a good supply of teachers, so Japanese programs can be maintained.

*PD session*

For the Japanese teachers we held an information session and a PD session. In the information session we explained our grant programs and student events, and introduced useful websites including our Classroom Resources Website. In the PD session we showed how to use quizzes in the classroom, and shared quiz questions. Our aim was to support teachers in advocating the study of Japanese to students through quizzes and other events.

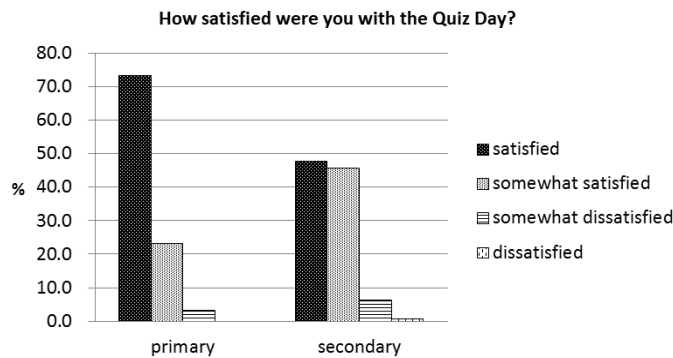
when	where	Quiz Day (students)	Film Night (students and parents)	Meeting with principals	PD
Mar 2015	TAS	602 students 29 schools	96	1	23
Feb 2016	WA	358 students 13 schools	68	---	11
Jun 2016	VIC	257 students 15 schools	48	---	10
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1217 students 57 schools</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>44</b>

**Table 1:** Numbers of participants in each component, by State

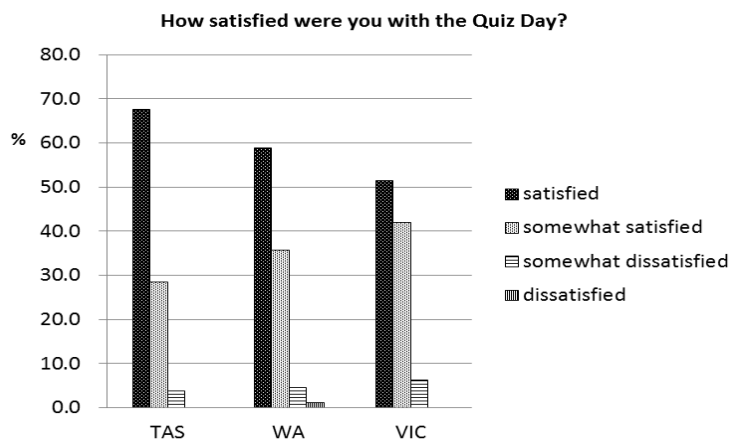
**Feedback**

Both students and teachers answered a questionnaire following the Roadshow. Additionally, three months after the first Roadshow in Tasmania, we conducted a follow-up survey in which we asked teachers what effect the Roadshow had had on their students, on themselves as teachers, and on the school community.

*Post-event questionnaire to students*



**Figure 1:** Student feedback (comparing primary and secondary)



**Figure 2:** Student feedback (comparing states)

From the survey we found that primary students responded more positively to the event than secondary students (Figure 1). This may be because the content of the quiz questions was more suited to the intellectual level of primary students.

Across the three states, Tasmanian students responded more positively than students from the other states (Figure 2). One possible reason for the relatively muted response in Victoria may be that the major event was held in a suburb of Melbourne, a multi-cultural city where students have more access to authentic Japanese language and culture. But the total rate of satisfied and somewhat satisfied was more than 90 percent in all states, so we can say that the Roadshow was successful in engaging students.

*Post-event questionnaire to teachers*

In order to find out how teachers perceived the program, we collected their comments and analysed them. We categorised the comments under four key words: entertaining, educational, teaching ideas, networking.

First of all, the **entertaining** aspect was positively evaluated by teachers who answered that ‘the range of (quiz) questions was really varied and students found it interesting’. Some teachers

found the program educational because ‘students learned new things about Japan that they can’t learn at school’. Other teachers commented that the quiz ‘helped to emphasise the importance of learning a language in a new way’. The program was **educationally** beneficial not only for students but also for teachers, as it gave them some **teaching ideas** and techniques which can be applied in the classroom.

Furthermore, as several different schools participated in the event, it was a good opportunity both for students and teachers to build **networks** between their peers from their area. Some teachers even mentioned that mixing students from different schools had a positive effect on their identity as learners. It is very important for students to recognize that they belong to a Japanese-speaking community, and we as teachers should support them in raising their awareness of this.

#### *Follow-up survey to teachers*

We conducted a follow-up survey three months after our first roadshow in Tasmania to ascertain if there were any ongoing benefits, asking teachers three questions.

- To the first question, ‘Have you noticed any changes in your students’ attitudes towards Japanese learning?’, many teachers responded that students have been more motivated since the roadshow.
- To the second question, ‘Have there been any changes in your thinking regarding Japanese teaching or in your classroom practices?’, some teachers responded that they have tried to use more Japanese or include more culture in their classes. From this feedback we can say that positive changes were evident in students and teachers.
- However, to the third question ‘Have there been any changes in the attitude of the school community and students’ families?’, the majority answered ‘There was little change’ or ‘No’. Parents and particularly principals have an important role to play in decision-making concerning languages in schools, but this result tells us that it is difficult to change their attitudes.

## **School Leader Fellowship Program**

### **Outline**

The School Leader Fellowship Program is a one-week program which provides an opportunity for school principals and administrators to explore Japan and gain an understanding of the benefits of Japanese language learning for their students. The program comprises a public authority visit, a school visit, networking opportunities, cultural experiences and sightseeing. The first program was held in February 2016, and 20 school principals and administrators participated.

### **Feedback**

After the program we collected feedback from participants via email, and 13 of 20 participants responded. We asked three questions to find out how and to what extent the program influenced participants’ perception of the Japanese program in their school.

- To the first question ‘Overall, how would you rate the tour?’, all participants responded with ‘Excellent’.

- To the second question ‘To what extent was the tour useful for you to think about Japanese language education?’, almost all participants responded with ‘To a great extent’. One participant commented that the program made him realise why language education was important and why Japanese was so important for Australia.

The last question asked the principals if the program had influenced how they saw the Japanese program within their school. We identified the following five types of responses:

- First, the program has led participants to better understand the Japanese program in their schools. One principal commented that he felt ‘more affinity and understanding of the place of Japanese language education in school’. Another principal mentioned that the program increased his awareness of the potential value of the Japanese language program.
- Second, the program has led participants to improve and expand the Japanese program and curriculum. One participant has made arrangements with teachers ‘to improve the curriculum, improve the language used in class’, and another has started to expand the number of year levels which offer Japanese at their school.
- Third, the program has led participants to improve ways of promoting their Japanese program. One participant commented that the program made him/her fully committed to publicising how successful, dynamic and strong the Japanese program is at his/her school and promoting it further on the school website and information days.
- Fourth, participants have recognised the importance of cultural understanding in language learning through the program. One participant understood that ‘the language needs to be taught within the context of the culture and both elements need to be part of the program to make it more effective’, even adding a comment that ‘just learning to speak the language could be an empty experience without the cultural context and understanding.’
- Lastly, some participants have started to create links with Japan, such as establishing a sister school program and organising a student tour of Japan. One participant whose school already has a sister school wishes to strengthen the existing program to create stronger links with the sister school.

Participants identified some aspects of the program that could be improved. One participant suggested time during the orientation for sharing brief background presentations on each other’s school Japanese program. Another suggested a daily de-briefing and reflection session. A further suggestion was for a follow-up evaluation of the long-term effects of the program. This feedback has shown us that there was a need to not just focus on the in-Japan part of the program, but to see it as part of an ongoing project in which participants would continue to network and support Japanese language education in their regions.

### **How can teachers be powerful advocates?**

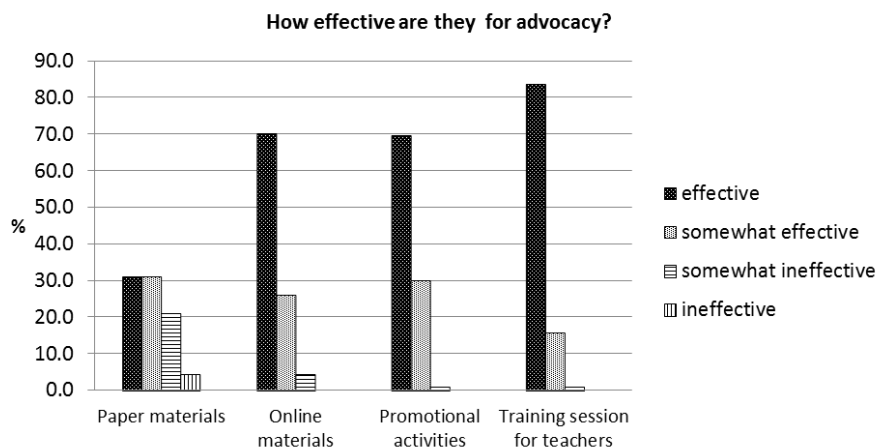
From the feedback above we learned that the Nihongo Roadshow had a significant impact on students and teachers, as did the School Leader Fellowship Program on principals and administrators. However, teachers are obviously key persons in advocacy, as they have contact with students, principals, and parents on a daily basis, and have therefore more opportunities to advocate the Japanese program in the school community. But how can teachers be powerful advocates? What do they need? In order to answer these questions, we conducted a supplementary survey with the help of 124 of the teachers who participated in the JFSYD Intensive Seminars and a number of state PD sessions. We asked two questions, as seen in Table 2, which teachers rated on a scale from 4 to 1.

**Table 2:** Questionnaire for advocacy survey

<p><b>Q1:</b> How effective do you think the following methods are for advocating Japanese study? Please rate from 4 (effective) to 1 (ineffective).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper materials (e.g. flyer, pamphlet)</li> <li>• Online materials (e.g. video, website, movie)</li> <li>• Promotional activities (e.g. students contest, cultural event)</li> <li>• Training session for teachers in advocacy skills</li> </ul>
<p><b>Q2:</b> How important do you think the following items are as information for advocacy? Please rate from 4 (very important) to 1 (unimportant).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A list of educational institutions where students can learn Japanese</li> <li>• A list of organisations where students can potentially apply their Japanese language skills</li> <li>• Hearing about the experiences of those who have learnt or are currently learning Japanese</li> <li>• Information about Japan and the Japanese language</li> </ul>

*Effective methods for advocacy*

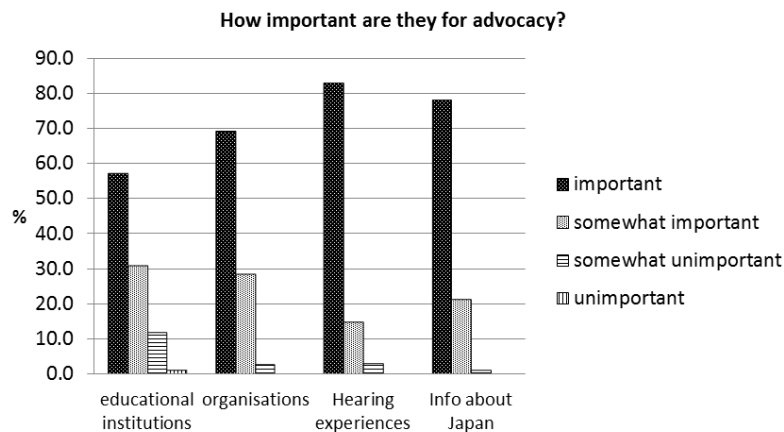
Regarding the first question, all items except paper materials were perceived as effective or quite effective. An advocacy training session for teachers was particularly highly rated (Figure 3). This indicates that teachers think they should take the lead in advocacy and gain the skills required.



**Figure 3:** Effective methods for advocacy

*Important information for advocacy*

Regarding the second question, all of the information listed was perceived as important, but teachers thought that hearing about the experiences of those who have learnt or are currently learning Japanese was particularly important (Figure 4).



**Figure 4:** Important information for advocacy

To summarize, there are four essential elements involved in advocacy: teachers who advocate, up-to-date and handy materials, workshops or sessions to gain advocacy skills, and networks to connect these elements. And advocacy materials should contain information such as personal experiences and pathways to the future.

## Findings and Conclusion

In order to boost students' engagement, providing opportunities to connect to Japanese language and culture through a program such as the Nihongo Roadshow is highly effective in remote areas. However, the Roadshow was less effective in cities where access to Japanese language and culture already exists. Secondly, while the Roadshow had an impact on students' engagement in the short to medium term, it is not clear how it will affect students in the longer term. Therefore, we should consider other possibilities for encouraging and maintaining student engagement.

The School Leader Fellowship Program had a significant impact on principals and administrators in leading them to recognise the importance of intercultural understanding and Japanese language programs in their own schools/ states. We need to follow up the relevant school programs to see if there is a long-term flow-on effect on the schools and their communities.

The supplementary survey revealed that materials and resources alone are not enough for advocacy, but advocacy skills and networking are also crucial. The next step will be to find what kinds of skills are required and how we can acquire and share them.

Despite the challenging situation we are facing, Japanese is still a leading mainstream language in schools taught by enthusiastic teachers who maintain vibrant teacher associations with strong networks around Australia. The Japan Foundation is very keen to support initiatives of teachers and their organisations and to collaborate with them in building and sharing strategies for advocacy of Japanese language learning.

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