

Using creative and imaginative texts to teach Japanese

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Introduction

The *Japanese Second Language P-10 Scope and sequence* was released in the middle of 2016 (SCSA, 2016). The inclusion of the *Creating* substrand and many references to creative and imaginative texts made it different to the curriculum that had been used previously in WA. I wanted to investigate the potential benefits of using creative texts in our languages classrooms, and to examine what the literature suggested as models for teaching with creative texts so that I could apply this in my teaching. I also aimed to collate quality resources that I could use with my primary Japanese classes.

As a primary school Japanese teacher, I had often read simple Japanese picture books, sung Japanese children's songs and studied an occasional Japanese traditional folktale play with my students, but I wanted to do this in a more effective and integrated way.

Background

Beechboro Christian School is a small primary school in a semi-rural setting on the fringe of the Perth metropolitan area. There are just over 200 students at the school. I started teaching Japanese at this school in the middle of 2016 to all of the students from Year One to Year Six for one 30-minute class a week.

Definitions

The SCSA Glossary (2016) defines 'imaginative texts' as follows:

Their primary purpose is to entertain through their imaginative use of literary elements. They are recognised for their form, style and artistic or aesthetic value. These texts include novels, traditional tales, poetry, stories, plays, fiction for young adults and children including picture books and multimodal texts such as film.

Regarding the *Creating* substrand, SCSA (2016) explains that:

Creating involves engaging with imaginative experience by participating in, responding to and creating a range of texts, such as stories, songs, drama and music.

Looking at the Literature

The first article that I read on the topic of using creative texts was by Morgan (2011, pages 20-29), who wrote:

Stories can be introduced as texts to be listened to and read aloud, for familiarising learners with the sounds, rhythms, 'feel' and forms of language, or as models for learning contextualised language use or to engage learners with the ideas and issues addressed in the stories.

I could see that there were benefits to be gained by using creative texts for language teaching but wanted to have some scaffolding or models to work with. The first model for using picture books to teach language that I came across was the ‘Tell me’ approach by Chambers (1983), which is elaborated on by Mourao (cited in Bland, 2015, chapter 11). This model encourages the students to participate in ‘authentic talk’ as they engage with the themes and ideas raised in a story. The model involves three stages, each of which sets key questions to discuss with students. A fellow Japanese teacher and native speaker, Junko Nichols, helped me to adapt and translate these questions into Japanese, as shown below.

‘TELL ME’ APPROACH

Stage 1: Reading and rereading
この本は何についてだと思いますか。
何がおこるとおもいますか。

Stage 2: Thinking and rethinking
好きな所がありましたか。
好きじゃない所がありましたか。
びっくりした事がありましたか。
あなたの人生と何かコネクションがありますか。

Stage 3: Discussion
思ったことありましたか。

Questions adapted from Mourao (cited in Bland, 2015)

The second model that I explored was ‘nine story steps for scaffolding through story and drama’ by Carol Read, as elaborated by Bland (illustrated below). I used both these models to guide my use of stories and picture books with my students. I realised that if I really wanted to exploit a text for language learning I needed to revisit the story many times with my students and guide them in different activities so that eventually they would be able to internalise and use the language from the texts.

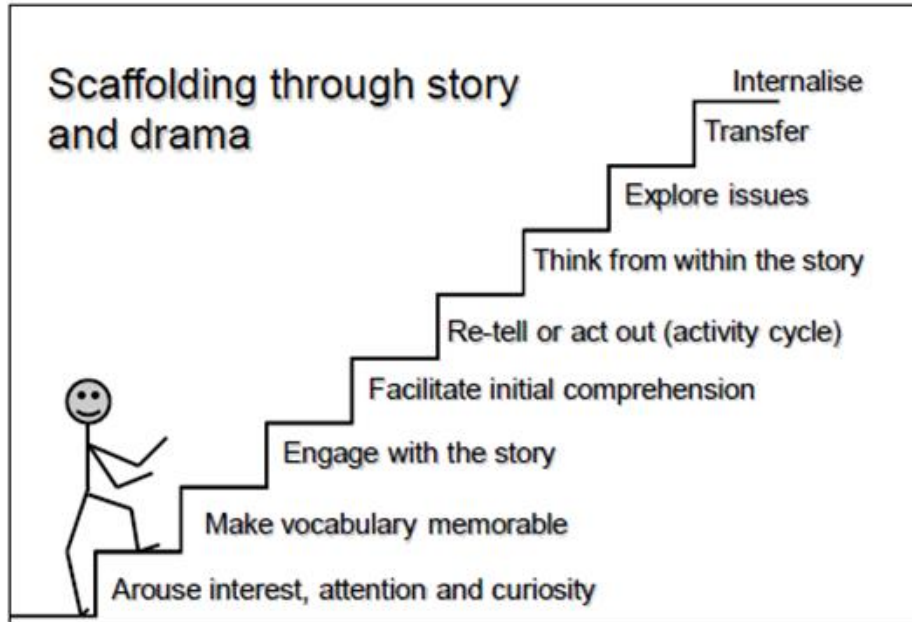
Cameron (2001, chapter 7) discusses the importance of choosing ‘quality’ stories so that the students can ‘enter the imaginative world that the story creates’:

Quality stories have characters and a plot that engage children, often the artwork is as important as the text in telling the story, and they create a strong feeling of satisfaction when the end is reached.

I realised that in the past I had read stories with very simple repetitive language in them to my students; now I wanted to explore stories that still contained simple language but with deeper themes, plots and characters.

I came across a chapter by Janice Bland (2015, chapter 8) titled ‘Grammar Templates for the Future with Poetry for Children’ which outlines many benefits of using poetry and practical examples of this from her experience of teaching English as a Second Language. After reading

this chapter on poetry I felt convinced that using simple poems could be beneficial for teaching Japanese to young learners as well. However, I realised that despite many years of studying Japanese I didn't know even one Japanese poem. I set out to find some Japanese poems that would be engaging and suitable to use with my primary students.



Read (2008) *Scaffolding through story and drama* (cited in Bland, 2015, chapter 10)

Program

Poetry

The first poem that I taught my students was the *Pikachu Haiku* by Kerry Forrest. This poem was ideal for students as it was about Pokemon – very popular with my students – and was short enough to be learnt by heart easily. Using a suggestion from Bland (2015, chapter 8) I incorporated actions into the retelling of the haiku.

ぴかちゅう は	Here is Pikachu
うみ で あそんで	He's playing at the seaside
たのしそう	It looks like such fun
By Kerry Forrest	

When I taught this *Pikachu haiku* to my students, I was pleased with how quickly they learnt the words and how much they enjoyed it. We had an interesting discussion about the different word order, comparing the Japanese and English version (which maintains the traditional syllabic pattern), we clapped out and counted the syllables and discussed how Japanese traditional haiku have references to nature and the seasons. The students were surprised to hear that Japanese doesn't have rhyme, which is something they readily associate with a poem. A few weeks after we had learnt this haiku I was explaining the particle は (wa) to my students and how it tells us the topic of the sentence when one of my Year Three students put their hand up with great enthusiasm to inform me that 'that's the wa in our Pikachu poem'. A couple of weeks after I taught this poem, the Year Three teacher commented to me that she had heard her students chanting the *Pikachu haiku* when she was out on duty at lunchtime.

An additional advantage of using the Pokemon-themed poem was that students were able to connect with things that their peers in Japan are interested in. Many of my primary school students enjoy collecting and exchanging Pokemon cards, reading Pokemon books and playing the Pokemon Go game on their parents' phones. Pokemon is also very popular with primary age children in Japan. I would like to further explore how Pokemon stories and comics could be used to engage my learners.

Adapting a picture book into a class drama

After seeing a Japanese translation by Japanese teacher Kathleen Duquemin of the English picture book *You are (not) small* by Anna Kang, I purchased the book and looked at how I could use this with my classes. The dialogue in the book is centred around two characters each labelling the other as big or small and arguing over this until a much smaller pink character and a much larger green character arrive, which changes the perceptions of the first two of big and small. I added speech bubbles so that the text all became dialogue; and after an initial reading I had my students act out the story as a drama. The students laughed as they acted out the text with dramatic actions. I was thrilled to hear Year One students starting to use the language that they were exposed to in the text. For example, one of the students said to me, 'I have a chiisai dog'. I also asked the students the questions from the 'Tell me' approach and was surprised when one of the students told me that this story was just like him and his brother, who often argued about who was bigger and cleverer.

I was reminded of what I had read by Cameron (2015, chapter 7) that

Stories offer a whole imaginary world created by language, that children can enter and enjoy, learning language as they go.

Motivating learners and making learning visible to a wider audience



Beechboro Christian School is part of a wider network of schools in Perth called the Swan Christian Education Association (SCEA). Under the guidance of the SCEA Languages Consultant, Mariel Howard, an annual foreign languages performance contest has been set up called 'SCEA Vision'. At this event primary school and high school students from the eight SCEA schools perform songs, poetry or drama in a language other than English. Some of the students perform in a language from their background while others perform in a language they are learning at school or one that they simply have an interest in. From attending and having my students participate in this event, I have seen students excited and motivated to be using a language other than English. Last year I taught my students the first verse of the Christmas song 'Silent Night' in Japanese, which they sang at the annual school Christmas Carols event. I enlisted the help of the music teacher, who also runs the school choir, so that they could practise in music classes. The students sang 'Silent Night' beautifully at the concert and I was thrilled when the music

teacher told me that after the concert students from the choir had approached her saying that they had so enjoyed singing in Japanese that they would like to learn a Japanese song for the choir to sing at SCEA Vision 2017!

Integrate with Cross Curricular Priorities

The Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2016) has three Cross-curriculum priorities that are designed to be incorporated across all of the subjects of the curriculum. When we were first becoming familiar with the draft ACARA Curriculum in 2015 my colleague Kaoru Tulloch and I wondered how we might incorporate the priority of Sustainability into our Japanese program. We decided to run incursion workshops for our primary school classes teaching on the theme of *mottainai*, which we termed ‘Learning about sustainability Japanese-style’. We read the picture book *Mottainai Baasan* by Mariko Shinju (2004) to the students and had them then create their own *mottainai* comics. We also adapted a *mottainai* song which we taught the students with accompanying dance moves. The students also enjoyed having the opportunity to revise daily routine verbs through a repetitive chant on *mottainai*. The students participated in ‘*mottainai origami*’ (making *kabuto* hats from newspaper), ‘*mottainai omocha*’ (boomerang flying toys from recycled cereal boxes) and ‘*mottainai furoshiki*’ where we wrapped up items in donated fabric. The *Mottainai Baasan* picture book, *mottainai* song and the chant provided rich opportunities for language learning and cultural insights for our students.

Challenges

One of my biggest challenges in teaching Japanese is having only 30 minutes a week. In the table below, I outline other factors that can be difficult when using creative texts to teach Japanese, along with some suggestions for how these might be addressed.

Possible challenges of using creative and imaginative texts	Some things to try
It is time consuming to find/adapt texts	Connect and collaborate with other Languages teachers to share resources Start small- try to use one short text first
It is time consuming to prepare students to perform a play/song/imaginative text as practise and learning by heart takes time	Provide resources for students to practise at home Work collaboratively with the classroom teacher (primary) or drama or music teacher
Authentic texts can have language which is too difficult or has too much unfamiliar language for the current level of the students	Simplify the text if it is a narrative, play or story Teach just the chorus of a song or one verse
Students can struggle to adapt /create texts if they struggle with creative /new ideas	Make the learning intentions clear Carefully scaffold the language that you want the students to use

Conclusion

There are many possible benefits of using creative and imaginative texts, which include: motivating students, raising the profile of language learning, supporting intercultural language learning, integrating with the cross-curricular sustainability priority, and supporting language

acquisition and learning. Following on from the success of my initial efforts to integrate poetry into my primary Japanese program, I have collected a number of traditional haiku and modern poems written by Japanese children which I am now using with my students. They are enjoying the cultural insights from these poems as they start to acquire the new language that they are exposed to from studying them. I continue to collate new picture books that I can use with my students and to look at new activities to engage the students. The majority of the literature that I read focuses on using creative texts to teach English as a Second Language, but I am hoping that there will be more resources published with examples of how poems and picture books are used to engage students in learning Japanese.

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