

2017

Creating New Synergies: Approaches of Tertiary Japanese Programmes in New Zealand [Review]

Michiko Kaneyasu

Old Dominion University, mkaneyas@odu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/worldlanguages_pubs

 Part of the [Japanese Studies Commons](#), and the [Linguistics Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Kaneyasu, Michiko, "Creating New Synergies: Approaches of Tertiary Japanese Programmes in New Zealand [Review]" (2017). *World Languages and Cultures Faculty Publications*. 10.

https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/worldlanguages_pubs/10

Original Publication Citation

Kaneyasu, M. (2017). Creating New Synergies: Approaches of Tertiary Japanese Programmes in New Zealand [Review]. *Japanese Language & Literature*, 51(1), 189-193.

the styles and conventions of different genres. Teachers can benefit by applying the chapter organization of *IAJR* to other texts geared toward the learners' interests in current events and other texts to teach reading in general.

Creating New Synergies: Approaches of Tertiary Japanese Programmes in New Zealand

Edited by Masayoshi Ogino, Penelope Shino, and Dallas Nesbitt.
Auckland: Massey University Press, 2016. 302 pp. NZ \$40.00.

Reviewed by
Michiko Kaneyasu

Change can be discouraging. Japanese language programs in New Zealand have experienced significant change over the past decade as the number of learners decreased by almost half from 2005 to 2015. This volume is a product of communication and collaboration among Japanese educators in New Zealand universities who shared a concern for the future of Japanese education in that country. They accepted change as an opportunity to look deeper into the existing situation and make positive, long-lasting contributions.

The book's nine chapters are organized into three parts. Part One, "Reflection and Renewal," contains two chapters that give an overview of the history and current state of Japanese language education in New Zealand at national and local levels. The next three chapters constitute Part Two, "Breaking Down the Walls." They report on different projects that aim to promote partnership and collaboration in the wider community. Part Three, "Sharing Teaching Approaches," contains the last four chapters, which describe and discuss particular teaching approaches that deal both with immediate enrollment challenges and the search for innovative alternatives to traditional ways of teaching.

Written by the editors of the volume, Ogino, Nesbitt, and Shino, chapter 1 introduces readers to the history and current state of Japanese language programs in New Zealand higher education. After providing an overview of the development of Japanese language

education, which began in 1965, the authors describe characteristics of the ten existing university Japanese programs, including profiles of instructors and students. The remainder of the chapter is devoted to the multiple factors contributing to declining enrollment, as well as plans and hopes for the future. The chapter highlights the role of Japanese Studies Aotearoa New Zealand (JSANZ), founded in 2013 as the first national advocacy organization for university-level Japanese language education, in encouraging new concerted efforts to promote Japanese studies.

Chapter 2, by Ashton and Shino, presents findings from a case study of the Massey University Japanese program, where the two authors teach. The study examines enrollment patterns from 2010 to 2015, using both statistical and qualitative interview data. It focuses on completion and retention rates in Japanese courses offered at the university's three campuses, two of which are physical and one virtual. Findings from the quantitative data uncover trends over time in the distribution of major and non-major students and the higher attrition rates in some courses and at certain stages, among others. Analysis of interview data from 14 students and 6 instructors contextualizes these findings and helps to identify areas of strength as well as those that need improvement.

Ogino and Payne, in chapter 3, report on the aims, activities, outcomes, and implications of an annual university-high school collaborative project, which began in 2013 at the University of Canterbury. The university has been hosting a large-scale one-day workshop event for high school seniors invited from local high schools. The workshop includes an opening session, a guest speaker, Japanese classes in small groups, and a dance project. The authors describe how this collaboration has strengthened connections between university and high school students and teachers and brought them together as members of a larger Japanese-speaking community beyond the walls of their individual classes and schools. The chapter also explores current and potential advocacy roles of this collaborative project.

The focus of chapter 4 by Kawai and Gallagher is the development of learner autonomy through cooperative education experience at Auckland University of Technology (AUT). Cooperative education (co-op) is a type of internship program that provides university students the combined benefit of classroom learning and real-life work experience. The authors analyze 29 e-portfolios of Japanese major graduates from 2010–2014 and report their findings on the students'

experiences. Based on the students' written self-reflections throughout their co-op participation, the authors illustrate how co-op improves learners' autonomy not just in terms of their language learning, but also in preparing themselves for work life after graduation.

While the students go into the community during co-op, the project described by Nishimura and Umeda in chapter 5 brings Japanese-speaking community members into the classroom. These visitor sessions, which have been held at University of Waikato over the last decade, invite short-term international students from Japan to second year Japanese classes; these visits typically occur once a week. In this study, the authors investigate 18 recorded conversations and survey data from 17 learners and 12 visitors who participated in the visitor sessions in 2015. Analysis of conversational data demonstrates that the visitor sessions encouraged learners to use Japanese more spontaneously and survey results confirm the authors' impression in past years that both parties enjoyed the experience.

In chapter 6, Minagawa gives an account of using TV drama scripts in her Japanese linguistics course to promote students' socio-cultural awareness and critical thinking skills. The drama scripts were used as linguistic data in one of the assignments with the aim of having the students examine language variation in modern Japanese society. Data for this study comes from presentation slides, final papers, and written feedback from 11 of the 25 students in the course. Minagawa reports that students were able to discover sociolinguistic features in the scripts that both conformed to and deviated from stereotypes. Furthermore, they were able to critically identify and analyze possible reasons for these deviations. The author suggests that, with some adjustments, drama scripts can also be incorporated into language courses.

Sometimes, innovation comes from necessity. Such is the case reported in Kawai, Waller, and Nesbitt's chapter 7. At their institution, due to a decrease in enrollment the number of second year Japanese courses was reduced; in addition, two levels were merged into one mixed-level class. To deal with this structural change, the authors, who are also the instructors, implemented project-based learning (PBL) in their non-sequential, mixed-level classes. PBL is a student-centered pedagogy in which students learn by working on a project that is prompted by a driving question. The authors describe the format of the two PBL-implemented courses based on seven PBL principles and examine students' perception of these non-traditional courses through

surveys and interviews. Although there are some shortcomings, such as the lack of authenticity in the students' driving questions, they conclude that PBL helps students develop social skills and promotes collaborative and intercultural learning.

Chapter 8 by Tabata-Sandom concerns classroom reading instruction. The survey findings from 51 students in second and third year Japanese classes portray the students' reading habits outside the classroom, types of difficulties they face when reading authentic Japanese texts, and students' self-motivation for improving their reading abilities. Tabata-Sandom also found in previous studies that students seek language-learning rather than pleasure from reading in Japanese. This attitude, she suggests, is instilled in the students by the exclusively intensive reading approach used in the classroom. The author argues that both students and teachers need to realize that reading abilities are only developed by reading, and advocates a balanced reading instruction that combines extensive reading for enjoyment and intensive reading for language learning.

Designing a classical Japanese course is the topic of the final chapter by Lawrence. By providing detailed rationales for his course, which targets upper-intermediate New Zealand students of modern Japanese, the author demonstrates how studying classical Japanese can be made relevant and interesting to the students and also help them learn modern Japanese. In his class, the focus is placed on understanding and developing ability to read pre-modern texts rather than mere memorization. Efforts are made to show the continuity of classical and modern Japanese at both lexical and grammatical levels. Texts chosen for use in class tend to be short, contain relatively concrete descriptions, are easy to visualize, and come from various time periods. The course also generates interest by introducing the students to pre-modern Japanese culture.

Many of the issues and approaches discussed in these nine chapters are relevant to teachers and programs in other countries and regions whether or not they currently face enrollment decline. Six out of eight case studies in the volume present findings based on students' experiences and feedback. Learning about students' backgrounds, their needs, interests, struggles, and future plans is an important step in (re-)establishing and growing a successful Japanese program, not just in New Zealand, but elsewhere. Although each chapter focuses only on a single class, program, or school, except for the chapter 1 overview, and the data samples are often quite small, readers will

appreciate the detailed contextual information given in each chapter as well as the samples of questionnaires and interview questions provided in some chapters' appendices. The theme and main purpose of the book, "creating new synergies," is maintained and highlighted throughout the volume. There are some terms in the book that readers outside New Zealand may find unfamiliar at first, such as "paper" (course) and "tertiary" (postsecondary). The book as a whole has succeeded in creating a synergism that can inspire Japanese language educators and advocates around the world to embark on similar efforts beyond the boundaries of individual programs and schools, or simply beyond one's usual teaching routine.