

BREEZE

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Third Annual Summer Workshop '95 For Secondary School Teachers of Japanese: A Report*

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The Third Annual Workshop was held at The Japan Foundation Language Center in the summer of 1995. There were two 8-day sessions for secondary school teachers of Japanese (Session I: June 21-29 and Session II: July 12-20). A total of 24 teachers successfully completed the course (11 participants in Session I, and 13 in Session II). Six quarter credits from UCLA Extension were available for those participants who wanted credits.

I. Objectives

Secondary school teachers usually teach 5 hours a day for 5 days a week to be full-time. During the school year, this busy schedule makes teachers very difficult to devote themselves for their own professional development, including observing other teachers' classes, evaluating their own teaching, and such. In addition, many secondary school teachers of Japanese teach in isolated places and cannot network or share teaching ideas. Thus, the objectives of the workshop were set as follows: (1) making teaching plans and demonstrating simulated teaching, (2) self-evaluating their own teaching, and (3) sharing ideas and experiences with other participants.

2. Content Pre-Workshop Assignments

Pre-workshop assignments had been sent two months prior to the workshop. The assignments were to read parts from the Omaggio's *Teaching in Context* (1993: pp.1-21, 73-88) and complete a worksheet. The worksheet consisted of questions illustrated by activities related to Japanese class so that it makes it easy for participants to understand the reading assignments from Omaggio. The purpose of the assignments was to familiarize the participants with practice as well as

theory of the proficiency-oriented instruction before they came to the workshop.

Introduction

The participants became acquainted with one another through an ice-breaking activity, and were familiarized with the objectives and content of the workshop.

Principles

The participants were familiarized with principles of the proficiency-oriented instruction. First, the worksheet from the pre-workshop assignments was reviewed along with practical classroom-activity demonstration. Second, Hypotheses and Corollaries (Omaggio: p.77) were discussed. Then, the participants discussed which Hypothesis and/or Corollaries they would like to realize in their simulated teaching.

Structure of the lesson

The participants were familiarized with the 'Structure of the lesson' used as a framework for this workshop. It consisted of three stages: INTRODUCTION, ACCURACY, and FLUENCY. The INTRODUCTION stage had two sub-stages: Presentation and Recognition. Each stage was described as follows:

Structure of the lesson

Introduction

<Presentation>

- Provide contextualization for learning
- Let learner know the functional objective of the lesson.

<Recognition>

- Give learning enough 'input' so that they can perceive and abstract the learning item

(form/meaning/usage)

Accuracy

- Make learners use the structures in a controlled way
- Practice the linguistic forms so that learners can produce and articulate the forms comfortably to develop accuracy

Fluency

- Make learners use the language in less controlled/more realistic/authentic way
- Let learners create their own language

Demonstration and Rationale

The purpose of this demonstration was to show them what a simulated teaching would be like and show how the stages can be presented in actual teaching. The participants, acting as students experienced a one-hour of a demonstration of simulated teaching, covering all the stages. After the demonstration, the rationale behind activities for each stage was explained.

Text Analysis

First, the participants examined given textbooks carefully in small groups. Then, they discussed each textbook with respect to its nature, and what stages of the 'Structure of the lesson' were sufficient and lack of activities. They also discussed useful parts of textbooks.

Application

Application of the principles of the proficiency-oriented instruction for actual teaching was demonstrated and discussed stage by stage. Criteria to examine teaching for each stage were presented. The following were the 'Checkpoints for Each Stage':

Check Points for Each Stage

Introduction

<Presentation>

- Set communicative functional objectives
- Give variety of examples
- Use learner's ability to guess
- Show meaning through a situation or context likely to be encountered

<Recognition>

- Use a variety of practices: drills, cues, class

organization

- Involve learners actively
- Make opportunities to express their own meaning
- Correct errors when necessary in an appropriate way

Fluency

- Encourage learners to express their own meaning
- Use contexts and situations likely to be encountered
- Encourage learners to interact actively in communication
- Encourage learners to interact spontaneously
- Make sure there is an information gap between speakers
- Keep the conversation flow (more than one Q & A)
- Correct no error during live interactions and give appropriate feedback afterward
- Minimize teacher talk

General Checkpoints

- Use more Japanese and less English
- Make sure the purpose of each activity is clear to the learners
- Confirm the learners' comprehension

After demonstration and explanation for each stage, the participants were assigned to design and demonstrate one or two activities in small groups. For example, a group was assigned to design an activity for PRESENTATION so that students would be able to express their daily schedule at the end of the lesson.

Making Teaching Plan

First, as a warm-up, groups of participants discussed what would be a realistic outcome for a given functional objective and designed a FLUENCY activity from the outcome as in an outcome-based teaching plan. Demonstration of each group's FLUENCY activity followed afterwards.

Second, "Action Research Plan" adapted from Nunan (1989) was introduced to improve teaching by following the four steps: (1) declare what aspects you choose to focus to improve in your own teaching, (2) implement teaching plan to keep what you have declared in mind, (3) comment on teaching by focusing on what you have declared, and (4) reflect on your teaching after viewing your own video. They filled out the declaration form for what aspects of teaching they would like to improve, implemented their plan according

to what they had declared.

Third, the participants started making teaching plans individually: (a) chose and analyzed a lesson from the textbook selected for their simulated teaching, (b) brainstormed a possible outcome, (c) designed FLUENCY activity, and (d) designed ACCURACY and INTRODUCTION activities keeping the outcome and FLUENCY activity in mind. In the process of making a teaching plan, the participants were instructed to check if the activities satisfied the checkpoints.

Consulting

Each participant consulted with the teaching staff after submitting the first draft for simulated teaching. The draft was closely examined using the checkpoints discussed earlier in the Application section.

Simulated Teaching

Simulated teaching was 50-minute long covering all the stages. A 15-minute discussion followed a simulated teaching. In the discussion, each participant commented on his/her own teaching based on the 'Declaration form' whereas others commented on their impressions as students, and as colleagues based on 'Checkpoints for each stage.'

Video Viewing/Self Evaluation

The participants viewed their own video and filled out the 'Self Evaluation form.' The form consisted of two parts: the first part was a list of points to check if they were satisfied, and the second was to comment on their own simulated teaching.

Discussion

The participants discussed their own teaching based on video-viewing and Self Evaluation. They realized what their strengths and weaknesses more clearly than before viewing their own video. We heard more critical comments than their comments immediately after their own simulated teaching.

Guest Speakers

We invited an experienced secondary-school teacher of Japanese as a guest speaker for each session. The guest speaker led a session on his expertise. Here are samples of topics covered in his lecture: motivation issues, useful activities, and technology including laser disc, computer-assisted instruction (CAI), and e-mail.

Others

There were some additional sessions such as introduction of videos/CAI and computer/word-processing software. We introduced materials such as new videos and CAI software which could be used at the secondary school level. Also, participants who hadn't been familiar with computer and Japanese word-processing software received hands-on experience. They as well as the other participants with experience were encouraged to use computer to write up a teaching plan.

3. Evaluation

We asked the participants to fill out a post-workshop evaluation questionnaire. The results showed their positive reactions to all the three objectives we set in the beginning of the course: (1) making teaching plan and demonstrating simulated teaching, (2) self-evaluating, and (3) sharing ideas. In addition, many participants found the 'Structure of the lesson,' 'Checkpoints for Each Stage' and 'Consulting' most useful in the process of making teaching plan.

4. Evaluators

We asked Mr. Nicholas Pond from Murray High School in Utah (Session I) and Mr. Kazuo Tsuda from United Nations International School in New York (Session II) to be the evaluator of our workshop as well as being the guest speaker. They observed the whole 8-day workshop, evaluated, commented and wrote a report on our workshop from the points of view of experienced high school teachers. Overall, their evaluations were very positive and encouraging, and at the same time, they gave us many concrete and practical suggestions. We would like to thank the two guest speakers/evaluators for their support, enthusiasm, and good ideas.

* This report used the terms introduced mainly in the second session of the workshop.

References

- Nunan, D. 1989. *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Omaggio-Hadley, A. 1993. *Teaching in Context*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

List of Participants Who Completed the Workshop

Session I

Mieko Fettrau, Harry Ainlay Composite High School,
Alberta, CANADA

Kevin Griggs, Weber High School, UT
Kiku Harvey, Longfellow Middle School, WI
Kristin Henshaw, Bambridge High School, WA
Yoshitaka Inoue, Kamiak High School, WA
Laura Lookner, Eaglecrest High School, CO
Sandra Lopez-Richter, Palm Beach County School, FL
Hirofumi Naganka, Lathrop High School, AK
John Patrick, Provo High School, UT
Todd Stevens, Exeter Area High School, NH
Hisa Stewart, Santa Teresa High School, CA

Session II

Ikuyo Coscarant, Gilbert High School, AZ
Chikako Itoh, Sedro-Woolley High School, WA

Mark Kannelsuna, Kalaheo High School, HI
Mieko Koike, Brian McMahon High School, CT
Nobuko Loncar, St. Andrew's Priory, HI
Chie Roessler, Williamsville North High School, NY
Cyrus Rolbin, Phillips Academy, MA
Gloria Rozmus, Menomonee Falls High School, WI
Raymond Stein, Mt. Edgecumbe High School, AK
Yvon Trepanier, Vancouver College, British Columbia, CANADA
Akiko Uchiyama, Greenfield High School, WI
Nahoko Vignean, Boston Latin Academy, MA
Laurence Wiig, South Medford High School, OR

The Report of the National Standards and Japanese Language Education Conference¹

Hiroko Kataoka
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In November 1995, ACTFL announced the completion of "Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century." Prior to the final compilation of the so-called national standards, Dr. Kataoka of the University of Oregon called for a conference regarding the national standards and Japanese language education. Upon adjournment of the conference she reported the results of the conference to ACTFL. The task force adopted some parts of the results of the conference and reflected them in the final edition of the standards.

Please note that this document shows a positive endeavor for reinforcement of the national standards from the Japanese language educators and not meant as mere criticism or opposition. We appreciate the effort of the ACTFL task force to listen to the voices of educators of the less commonly taught languages, especially Japanese.

We are sorry to omit the "Specific Comments on Standards and Sample Benchmarks" due to the limited space. The complete copy, however, is available upon request.

The Conference

The National Standards and Japanese Language Education Conference was held on April 14-15, 1995 at the Japan Foundation Language Center in Santa Monica, California. The purposes of the conference were to examine the current draft of Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Goals for

the 21st Century, and to make concrete recommendations for the Student Standards Task Force as feedback from a less commonly taught (LCT) language group for possible integration into the final document.

The conference was supported by the Northeast Asia Council of the Association of Asian Studies and the Japan Foundation Language Center. In addition, universities, colleges, schools, Japanese teachers associations, and individuals contributed generously to this project by providing financial support so that more individuals could participate.

Participants

There were 26 participants in the conference, including eight secondary school teachers, ten college faculty members, five K-12 administrators, two Japan Foundation Language Center personnel, and one private foundation representative.

Procedure

All participants were given a copy of the March 15, 1995 draft of Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Goals for the 21st Century prior to the conference. They were directed to read it carefully and take notes on what was usable and what could be changed to make it appropriate for Japanese language instruction. All participants completed this assignment.

The conference started at 4:00 p.m. on Friday. The group met for two hours to discuss the general background of the National Standards project. This session was led by Ron Walton of the National Foreign Language Center, a member of the Standards Task Force. Walton described the National Standards Project as it applied to less commonly taught foreign languages. His twenty-minute presentation was followed by numerous questions and lively discussion.

Saturday session began at 9:00 a.m. with the participants dividing into five small groups to discuss pros and cons of the Standards document. The groups reconvened at 11:00 a.m. to report on the small group discussions.

The afternoon was somewhat more complicated. From 1:30 to 3:30, participants divided into two large groups, Group A and Group B. Group A consisted of participants who wanted to discuss strategies to utilize the National Standards; Group B worked to formulate specific revisions for each Standard. Group A began by conducting a strategies brainstorming session. After about an hour, Group A finished this discussion, and divided into two sub-groups, to discuss Goals 2 and 3 respectively, including suggestions for possible revisions. The Group B participants immediately broke into three sub-groups, and discussed Standard 1.1., 1.2., and 1.3., respectively. At 4:00 p.m., participants once again gathered together to report and further discuss the issues taken up in the small groups.

Due to time limitations, Goals 4 and 5 were not discussed individually.

Strengths of the National Standards

Over the course of this conference, participants identified the following strengths of the national Standards:

- **Political value.** The majority of participants agreed that the Standards provide a valuable political tool. The generic value of the Standards coupled with the inclusion of LCTs indicates that LCTs are not marginal and deserve the attention given commonly taught languages. The Standards can also forge political alliance among all foreign languages.

- **Vision.** The Standards provide a vision and a set of goals toward which to work.

- **Practical value.** Although many participants criticized the Standards as being "merely political" while lacking pedagogical value, other participants felt that there was practical value, because people will use them as a standard for evaluating Japanese programs.

- **Clarification of expectations.** The Standards provide a good guide for language teachers, focusing on content and outcome of teaching.

- **Benefits to parents and administrators.** The Standards help parents and administrators understand the benefits of language learning, and provide realistic expectations about foreign language instruction as well as clarify developments in Japanese language education.

- **Guidelines for teacher training.**

The Standards can provide guidelines for training both teachers and teacher educators.

- **Foundation.** The current Standards provides a solid foundation for even better standards in the future.

- **Articulation.** The Standards are clearly articulated, which is a must for teachers.

- **Specific Goals.** The specific goals contained in the Standards contribute to powerful arguments when fighting for programs.

- **Benchmarks.** Although many criticized sample benchmarks, others felt that they can be useful in a limited sense. People need to understand, however, that they are "samples." Given this caveat, such benchmarks may be useful in convincing administrators of the need for an early start for Japanese programs, by arguing that language instruction must start earlier to achieve these benchmarks. The benchmarks could also provide incentives to expand language programs.

- **Standards as goals.** Although the Standards may be seen as "dreams," they can also encourage students to work toward concrete goals. The Standards can also provide some accountability for both students and teachers, as well as setting goals for language teachers.

- **Early start.** It is good that elementary school programs are included. Although currently very few such programs exist for Japanese language instruction, we may expect a rise in the number of elementary programs in the near future.

- **High expectations.** Although some participants questioned the extremely high expectations of the Standards, others felt that the high standards potentially push forward the profession by raising expectations.

Concerns and Problems with the Standards Document

Over the course of the conference, participants voiced the following concerns about the Standards:

- **Pedagogical values.** The majority of participants criticized the Standards failure to specify performance levels or strategies for assessment as the most significant problem of the document. They felt that, without such levels and strategies, the standards have no pedagogical value.

- **Level of sample benchmarks. Participants felt** that sample benchmarks are aimed too high for Class 4 languages, especially in reading and writing.

- **Assumption of unrealistic amount of time.** Similarly, participants were also concerned that the Standards assume an unrealistic amount of classroom time spent in foreign language education. Although it is good to aim high, participants felt unrealistic expectations render the aim worthless.

- **Potential "mandating" problems.** The document clearly states that the Standards are voluntary, and that they should not be imposed upon states or the schools². However, the group was concerned that the document may take on the implications of mandate, with sample benchmarks misinterpreted as mandatory goals. And if that were to happen, LCTs, especially the Class 4 languages such as Japanese and Chinese, become vulnerable. No school or teacher could perform at those "mandated" levels. There was fear that programs would be shut down as a result.

- **Value of benchmarks.** The document explicitly states that benchmarks are simply samples, not for all languages, and that the Standards are neither to be imposed upon nor required of states or the schools³. However, participants feared that, once in the hands of regional or local departments of education and administrators, the benchmarks would be mistaken for goals and would be imposed on all languages, despite the paragraph identifying cautions for LCTs. The danger is that state education people may evaluate all language students equally based on the benchmarks. Teachers feared that such a practice would generate unreasonable expectations-resulting in criticism - of Japanese programs. (In fact, even many participants in this conference started confusing the standards, goals, and benchmarks. And these are the people who have studied the document very

thoroughly and have discussed it extensively. One can imagine what would happen to the uninitiated!)

- **Single entry point vs. multiple entry points.**

Participants felt that it would be useless for the Standards to assume a single entry point at K for Japanese (or other LCT) language instruction, since there are hardly any K- 12 Japanese language programs in the United States at this time. The majority of the pre-college Japanese programs are 9-12 only; therefore, the benchmarks as written are irrelevant, even after making adjustments to suit Japanese, as long as they assume that the students have had eight years of Japanese by the start of 9th grade, when in reality students have had none. In addition, most current Japanese pre-college programs offer only two or three years of instruction.

- **Written language.** The biggest problem participants identified in the sample benchmarks concerned the treatment of the written language (reading and writing). The most difficult aspect of Japanese is learning to read and write. Participants felt that some changes needed to be made in the standards and benchmarks that deal with reading, writing, and the use of written materials for languages with non-Roman orthographies.

- **Teacher certification issues.** Some participants feared that the Standards could be unfairly used as a basis for teacher certification. Sample benchmarks imply that teachers are expected to possess much higher proficiency levels in the foreign language they teach than they currently do. Since few Japanese programs currently exist at the K- 12 level, those who complete teacher training programs in Japanese in the next decade are unlikely to attain proficiency much higher than the highest Standards benchmarks. In addition, secondary school teachers were particularly concerned about the advanced literary background implied by the Standards. Such expectations could discourage non-native speakers from becoming foreign language teachers, especially teachers of Japanese.

- **Learning scenarios.** Many Japanese teachers found the sample learning scenarios difficult to apply to LCT languages. Due to time limitations, those scenarios were not discussed in detail. However, most of the issues raised for the sample benchmarks also apply to the learning scenarios.

Suggested Changes

During the course of the conference, participants offered various suggestions for changes to the Standards document.

Some were general comments, others specific. For the purpose of this report, they have been divided into three categories: general suggestions, suggestions for applying the Standards to Japanese, and specific suggestions for each goal and sample benchmark.

General Suggestions for changes:

General suggestions and requests for changes can be summarized as follows:

- Σ Shorten and simplify the document.
- Σ Rewrite the document in better English.
- Σ Provide a separate version without benchmarks for administrators. Some participants suggested that there ought to be two versions of the document: one version, for administrators and parents, with goals and standards only, and the other for teachers, which would include sample benchmarks and sample learning scenarios.
- Σ Develop supplemental versions of the Standards for each language, with sample benchmarks and learning scenarios.
- Σ If sample benchmarks are to be included in the main document, specify that the sample benchmarks are for Spanish, French, and German so as to clarify that they are NOT for Class 4 (or any other) languages.
- Σ If sample benchmarks are to be included, develop multiple entry levels with introductory, intermediate, and advanced (or whatever the wording may be) benchmark samples, rather than 4th, 8th and 12th grade. In LCTs, including Japanese, few K-12 programs exist (a situation which is expected to persist in the near future); therefore the whole effort of constructing grade-level benchmarks may be of very little value-if not wasted or even harmful-for LCT languages.
- Σ Include discussion of the class time required to reach sample benchmarks so no one misunderstands the expectations.
- Σ Assess the applicability of the standards/benchmarks before publishing the document. See how many students would/could actually meet the standards/benchmarks.
- Σ Organize a task force to develop sample benchmarks for LCTs, for each language (Japanese, Chinese, Arabic, etc.), or for each Class of languages (Class 1, Class 2, Class 3, Class 4).
- Σ Adjust the Standards to each individual language, to better suit its specific needs.
- Σ Eliminate learning scenarios; they are confusing and biased towards MCTs.
- Σ Rewrite the LCT section to address the very real differences between LCT and MCT in language teaching and

learning. Simply stating the "greater challenge" for LCTs is not acceptable; explicit substantiation is necessary, including such issues as the differences in writing systems and culture information. (See the next section, Suggestions for **Applying the National Standards to Japanese.**) In addition, a paragraph on why some languages carry unique problems should be added. Further elaboration could be provided by each language, state, or school district, including sample benchmarks.

Suggestions for Applying the National Standards to Japanese:

One group devoted time to brainstorming strategies for applying the National Standards in Japanese language instruction. The participants came up with several strategies and suggestions to be included in the paragraph for LCTs (page 10 of the Standards document) which would make the current Standards usable in Japanese instruction. The group decided that the following ought to be considered:

- Σ Many LCTs have writing systems that are not phonetic and therefore require much more time for students to attain proficiency in than in MCTs. The Standards should explicitly consider the difference in orthographic symbols.
- Σ LCTs generally do not share cognate vocabulary with other languages.
- Σ LCTs involve teaching about cultures that differ considerably from those of American English and the mainstream European languages. The cultural appropriateness of functions such as persuasion or debate is complex and unfamiliar, and must be taught as part of the language. It is also important to address the stereotypes learners may have about LCT cultures.
- Σ Youth culture-and the culture as a whole-is rapidly changing. Since many areas lack large Japanese communities, it takes more effort and time to teach about the culture. The specific components of culture need to be addressed in the Standards.
- Σ The Standards document should clearly explain the differences that exist between the written and spoken communication styles. Differences observed in conversation according to such factors as age and social status should also be acknowledged.
- Σ Issues concerning the teaching of the written language should be integrated into the document; it will be harder for LCTs to meet benchmarks because of the difficulty of learning the written language.
- Σ The teacher-student ratios must be lower for LCT classes.
- Σ Because authentic materials are difficult to obtain,

classes take more time to plan and develop.

Σ LCTs require a longer commitment from all concerned, including a longer commitment of administrative funding.

The group suggested a need for Japanese-specific guidelines. Since many of the participants are also members of state-level task forces working on guidelines, it was suggested that some of them get together in the near future and work on the Japanese-specific document ⁴.

Participants also reinforced the feeling that the Standards should concentrate on the 9-12 level, since so little Japanese instruction currently occurs at the K-8 levels. At the same time, participants recommended learning more about K-8 programs, examining the Australian guidelines since they appear to be further ahead of the U.S. in terms of pre-college Japanese language education.

General Observations ⁵

I would like to conclude this report with my own observations of the discussions and group work at the conference. Some may be strongly relevant to the writing of the Standards; others are simply a reference. I believe they all have something to say about the document and the making of it.

Σ Many of the positive comments about the document came from the secondary school teachers themselves.

Σ Many participants confused the goals, standards, and benchmarks. This observation repeats a previous comment, but I would like to emphasize the fact that people do confuse them. As mentioned before, the participants in this conference, despite having studied the document very carefully, confused these terms in the midst of heated discussions. During such discussions some were saying that the standards were too difficult, although what they were actually referring to were the benchmarks. This is a good indication that others, including school districts, administrators, and parents, WILL confuse them, whether intentionally or unintentionally. This also led me to support the suggestion that each language add its own sample benchmarks.

Σ There were numerous criticisms of the benchmarks at the beginning, but as each group went through them item by item, many were accepted as is or with minor changes in wording (which could, nevertheless, imply very important changes).

Σ We did not have enough time to go over learning scenarios, but I believe the same kinds of problems and arguments would be seen there as well. I would like the task

force to weigh the pros and cons of generic sample benchmarks and learning scenarios in the document. If they are included, I would suggest two things: one, having separate documents for different audiences (the complete document for teachers, and a shorter version with the bare basics-without sample benchmarks and learning scenarios-for administrators, school districts, and parents); and the other, providing a very detailed, fully developed section (rather than a mere paragraph) for LCTs.

Σ Seriously consider multiple entry points. I would like reemphasize the importance of considering multiple entry points in writing up benchmarks and learning scenarios. All participants understood that the Standards Taskforce probably will not change the 4th, 8th, and 12th Grade benchmarks, but a different type of division would be far superior for LCTs, which are extremely unlikely to have K-12 programs. If ACTFL wants the LCT community to accept the Standards, something will have to be done about the entry point issue. Again, a separate document for each language may solve the problem. Otherwise, however, I am afraid that setting up multiple entry points may be the only way in which the LCTs would seriously consider supporting the Standards.

Footnotes

1 I would like to thank the following individuals for taking notes during the conference: Leslie Birkland; Chris Brockett; Tim Cook; Carl Falsgraf; Tim Hart; Kathleen Streit; Yasu-Hiko Tohsaku; and Yasuko Ito Watt.

2,3 One participant offered the following comment in his review of the final draft of this report:

Fundamental contradiction. "Standards" implies a mandate and "benchmarks" implies a goal. Standards that don't have to be met are not standards. Benchmarks that do not represent a goal are not benchmarks. These paragraphs suggest that those who make these criticisms didn't read the document or misinterpret-ed it. Rather I think these folks are pointing out a contradiction in the document.

4 A group has already begun work on a model of state standards which can serve as a reference for other states writing standards for Japanese.

5 Please note that these observations are my own. They are neither the consensus of the entire group nor were they discussed by the participants.

The Japanese Magnet Program (JMP)

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BRIEF HISTORY

In 1986 a group of parents met with Portland Public School's Curriculum Department and requested that their students have an opportunity to develop a second language through their elementary years. Citing the successes of French, Spanish, and German Immersion style education in North America, the parents were pressing to have Japanese. This was as a result of Pacific Rim relationships booming in the business and tourist world. Reluctant to pioneer the district's first immersion attempt in an elementary language that no one else was doing, Spanish was selected. At its successful implementation, a task force of school district personnel and Japanese community advisory board was established to launch a Japanese Elementary Immersion program in 1989.

Several important decisions were made at that time that helped shape the future for the Japanese Magnet Program. The district would choose a centrally located school and offer 50% Japanese and 50% English instruction beginning with all day Kindergarten. Students would represent all areas of the city (NW, NE, SW, SE); diverse ethnicities; and reasonable male, female balance; a stratified random sample selection (i.e. lottery by categories). Families must be residents of Portland Public School District and the child must be five on or before September 1st of the entering year.

Richmond Elementary School, with a supportive and innovative, third generation Japanese American principal, Renee Ito-Staub, was designated as the host school. It welcomed 54 kindergartners in September 1989 and has grown by one grade level each year to accommodate 320 Kindergarten through fifth grade students in 1995, with twelve energetic Japanese speaking staff and six excellent English teachers.

In 1993-94 the planning for articulation to the middle school took place with a committee including teachers, administrators and parents. Mt. Tabor Middle School was identified as the suitable site. Just this September it launched the new phase of the Japanese Magnet Program with sixth grade. A generous grant from the Japan Foundation will support the three year implementation. The students now

experience their humanities block in Japanese which is about 40% of their day. Planning for the High School years will begin in 1996.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Although wonderful Japanese materials exist, it has been a challenge at each grade level to identify, gather, and create appropriate elementary classroom materials.* We begin by having the English teacher and Japanese teacher (an "arranged marriage") planning appropriate themes together. These themes will encompass the required grade level curriculum for Oregon schools, with strands for math, science, social studies, language arts, multicultural and creative arts all tying in. Students have the opportunity to develop vocabulary in both languages with complementary lessons. As appropriate to the yearly themes, Japanese culture is also integrated.

Kindergartners discover in their transportation studies that a school bus can't take them from Portland to Japan. While they learn about boats and jets etc. they pretend to travel to Japan and pack a suitcase with things they need. They see the video about Sesame Street's Big Bird and his visit to Japan. Learning through the daily calendar, songs, stories and games they play, the children are able to identify vocabulary with Hiragana sounds and recognize the symbols.

When they move on to first grade, they learn to read and write Hiragana while exploring Japanese courtesies and holidays woven in with seasons, science, and social studies. In Second grade they map the Richmond neighborhood and compare it with a Japanese neighborhood. They also explore stories about animals and plants while learning to read and write katakana.

Third graders begin to find that Portland has a lot of ties to Japan through its sister city, Sapporo. They compare a Japanese style garden with the International Rose Testing and Shakespeare style garden that Washington Park allows for onsite exploration. Kanji tests and journal writing take a more serious literacy turn with increasing homework requirements. Hands on calligraphy every week make it all exciting.

Environmental studies give fourth graders a chance to explore "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" in both an Oregon context and that of "sister" state, Toyama. They also explore their many "Trails to Oregon" and find that the Japanese are not newcomers but have been active and important contributors to our state for many years. They find that creative writing in Japanese can be fun too as they explore elements of Native American folk tales.

The big payoff of Elementary Japanese Immersion for the fifth graders is anticipating a summer trip to Japan. While learning about The United States through colonial to Native American and modern architecture, they also explore the traditional Japanese house. Beginning to write to pen pal at Katoh Gakuen's English Immersion Program in Numazu, Shizuoka at the foothills of Mt. Fuji, motivates them to expand and improve their functional use of Japanese while they anticipate the experience of a life time.

The involvement of the fifth grade parents and Oyanokai (JMP parent organization) did extensive coordination and fundraising to ensure that all students wanting to participate in the trip to Japan were able to do so. They selected the slogan "Our Dreams Take Flight". The thrill of success has been experienced by students, families and staff. When the new middle school students returned to Richmond to share their pictures, omiyage and experiences in Japanese with the fourth and fifth graders, this writer almost burst with emotion. It was especially moving to hear a summary statement that the worst thing about the trip to Japan was "Sayonara"! The foundation in Japanese immersion is being laid for a lifetime of learning!

* The NEH sponsored Japanese Immersion Thematic Integration Workshop at Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon this past summer provided participants opportunity to develop many themes that are to be shared after trial implementation this school year.