Pedagogical Theories and Approaches to Teach Young Learners of Japanese as a Heritage Language

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Abstract

This paper proposes a theoretical framework for the development of curricula for Japanese heritage language schools. Although these schools provide most of the Japanese heritage language (JHL) instruction available to elementary and secondary school pupils, they have received little attention or support from the academic community. Specifically, they are in need research-based knowledge as well as models for teaching methodology, developing curricula and instructional materials, and providing teacher training. This paper examines recent theories and approaches in the fields of heritage language education, bilingualism, and instruction that is developmentally appropriate to young learners. The paper then proposes a process of curriculum design that integrates and applies these theories and approaches. The curriculum proposed here could also be used in heritage language schools for other languages.

Introduction

With the exception of Spanish, most pre-college instruction in heritage languages (HL), including JHL, is provided by weekend heritage language schools. HL schools are generally run by ethnic communities or religious organizations rather than the formal school system. Douglas (2003) reports that among the students who enrolled in her college JHL course, 24 out of 38 students had studied Japanese at either JHL schools or hoshukoo (supplementary schools), Japanese schools for children who are expected to return to Japan. Chao (1997) discusses the similar role played by heritage schools in the maintenance and development of Chinese.

HL schools have received little attention or support from the academic community in the form of research on teaching methodology, curriculum and materials development, or teacher training. Moreover, the existing research suggests that HL teacher education and methodology are inadequate. For example, Sasaki (2001) compares the classroom discourse of JHL schools with that of Japanese as a foreign language at public schools in Brazil and Hawaii. She concludes that teachers at JHL schools lack classroom management skills, knowledge of instructional methodology, and teaching strategies. Kataoka, Furuyama, and Koshiyama (2001) find a pressing need for teacher training. No U.S. institutions offer teacher training to JHL teachers. Moreover, there are no coherent pedagogical theories to teach heritage languages (Valdés 2001), no program or plan of action for classroom teachers at the middle and high school levels (Webb 2000), and a shortage of appropriate instructional materials (Gambhir 2001; Schwartz 2001).
To develop curricula for young JHL learners, this paper first examines and integrates current theories and approaches developed in the fields of heritage language education, bilingualism, and a developmentally appropriate approach to instruction for young learners. The paper then discusses curriculum design and proposes a curricular model.

**JHL Education and Learners in the U.S.**

**JHL Education**

Two types of schools, Japanese heritage schools (JHS) and hoshuukoo, provide JHL education in the United States. JHSs were established by immigrant parents before World War II to maintain Japanese language and culture for the next generation. There are 50 JHS schools in the United States (42 out of 50 are located in California and Hawaii). Most JHSs are non-profit and operate on weekends with funding from tuition and fund-raising.

Hoshuukoo were established in the 1970s and 1980s to educate children whose parents planned to return to Japan after a few years in the U.S. There are 73 hoshuukoo in the U.S., enrolling a total of 11,881 students (57.5% of all Japanese school age children living in the United States) in grades K-12, according to a survey by the the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (data collected 2004) (2005). Hoshuukoo receive financial support from the Japanese government and local Japanese business communities. A few experienced teachers, who have Japanese teaching credentials, are recruited from Japan for short-term assignments.

In their study of the language environment of young JHL learners at JHL schools and hoshuukoo, Douglas, Kataoka, and Kishimoto (2003) report that many of these schools’ students are fourth and fifth generation Japanese, who do not speak Japanese at home. Eighty nine percent of the learners at the JHL schools and 27% of those at hoshuukoo are JHL learners. Although JHL schools have shifted their goals from teaching Japanese as a mother tongue to teaching it as a foreign language, hoshuukoo still teach Japanese as a mother tongue and adopt the same curriculum used for Japanese monolingual native speakers in Japan. Therefore the original educational goals of these schools do not meet the needs of many JHL learners, who grow up in a bilingual environment.

In addition to the inadequacy of instructional methodology and materials, Nakajima (1998) points out problems of learner motivation, curriculum content and inadequate instructional time. Most JHL schools operate for two to three hours on weekends, which is insufficient time to develop solid literacy skills. Finding that the reading ability of JHL school children does not surpass the fourth grade level of their monolingual counterparts in Japan (Nakajima 1988), Nakajima stresses the importance of language education at home to compensate for this insufficiency. She notes that while parents make the decision to enroll their children in a Japanese school, their children may not wish to attend. Nakajima also points out that the educational goal of these schools is to teach language rather than academic content by way of the language. The curricula used in these schools
do not support learners’ development of age-appropriate cognitive academic language proficiency. Nakajima’s conclusion is supported by Sasaki’s (2001) study, which found that instruction at these schools emphasized drill and practice of isolated language skills; this kind of teaching does not reflect current knowledge of how children learn. Both modern curricular development and the changing demographics of the student body at JHS and hoshuukoo indicate that a new type of curriculum is called for.

**JHL Learners**

This section discusses profiles of HL learners in general as well as those of young JHL speakers.

Recent studies on high school and college HL education point out the heterogeneity of learners’ language proficiency (Draper and Hicks 2000; Gambhir 2001; Schwartz 2001; Valdés 1995, 2000, 2001; Wang and Green 2001). Although the development of their higher-order thinking skills is varied, they all have basic cognitive skills such as the ability to comprehend, describe, compare, and infer. However, young HL learners’ development in other domains (e.g., cognitive, social and emotional) is as important as linguistic development. Moreover, these learners’ development in all domains is heterogeneous, and therefore curriculum design requires a discussion of development across domains.

**Heterogeneous Language Proficiency**

JHL children’s exposure to Japanese varies widely, depending on their language experiences with parents and siblings at home, friends and others in the community, and native speakers in Japan. JHL students grow up in a Japanese-English bilingual and sometimes a trilingual environment. Their parent(s) are native speakers of Japanese and other languages with the exception of English. Douglas, Kataoka, and Kishimoto (2003) found that 46% of JHL school students came from bilingual homes, where both Japanese and English were spoken. Most children at hoshuukoo, on the other hand, were from monolingual homes, where Japanese was used between parents (88%), fathers and children (87%), and mothers and children (95%). The children from bilingual families were simultaneous bilinguals, who had acquired Japanese and English at the same time, and those from monolingual families were early sequential bilingual, having acquired Japanese at home first, followed by English at pre-school.

Valdés (1995, 2000, 2001) explains the language proficiency of HL speakers as a continuum of bilingual language development. Valdés dismisses the notion of the “mythical bilingual”, whom she defines as follows: “a bilingual person is two monolinguals in one who can do everything perfectly in two languages and who can pass undetected among monolingual speakers of each of these two languages” (2001: 40). She argues that this type of bilingual is theoretically possible but not realistic, and that bilingualism means linguistic competencies in two languages, which differ among individuals and undergoes changes over time through language contact and use. JHL

The heterogeneous development of language knowledge among heritage speakers presents a challenge to heritage language education (Draper and Hicks 2000; Gambhir 2001; Schwartz 2001; Valdés 1995, 2000, 2001; Wang and Green 2001) and must be taken into account in the delivery of heritage instruction.

Heterogeneous development in cognitive, social and emotional skills. Researchers of early childhood and elementary school education emphasize the importance of young learners’ unique and idiosyncratic experiences and backgrounds, which lead to heterogeneous cognitive, social and emotional development. Hart, Burts, and Charlesworth (1997) advocate developmentally appropriate practice, which is based on the knowledge and skills displayed by the children being taught. Katz and Chard (1997) base their recommendations on developmental differences in the acquisition of academic knowledge, skills (physical, social, communicative and cognitive), and the development of dispositions, interest, and feelings. They suggest applying heterogeneous approaches in teaching that takes these differences into account. Stone (1996) points out that children between the ages of five and nine vary widely in their learning rates, styles, and personalities.

Piaget’s theory of four-stage cognitive development, despite occasional inaccuracies across cultures and explored with varied research methods and instruments, offers much guidance for curriculum development. Krogh’s (1997) brief description of Piaget’s four stages is below.

There are four stages in the child’s development from birth to early adulthood. The sensorimotor period covers the first two years in which the physical senses and motor activities form the bases of the infant’s cognitive development. From the beginning of the child’s third year, the preoperational period takes over for the next five or six years; at this time, children become able to use one thing to symbolize another, a critical step in the progress toward abstract understandings and school learning. The third stage, the concrete operational period, lasts throughout the elementary school years. During this time, children gradually decenter their attention from themselves, leaning to see things from other’s points of view in both the cognitive and social sense. They learn to reason more logically and understand their learning more fully, as long as concrete objects are present in reality or in their thoughts. Finally, the formal operational stage begins to appear at age 11 and extends through early adulthood. Its hallmark is the ability to think abstractly in a systematically logical way. (p. 34)

Piaget’s four stages of child development provide the general characteristics of developmental stages. However, curriculum design requires further breakdown by age to provide a sufficiently concrete learner profile, especially in the third stage “concrete operational periods” that apply to almost all elementary school grades.
Furthermore, in addition to Piaget’s general developmental characteristics, effective curriculum design requires the consideration of children’s language development. Shibata (1956) proposes three periods of language development: “prior to language formation period (from age zero to three)”, “language formation period (from age four to fourteen)”, and “subsequent to language formation period (fifteen and older)”. Based on the results of studies on bilingual language development, Nakajima (1998) argues that Shibata’s first period is as important as other periods for the development of bilingual ability. She includes this period as a part of the “language formation period” and proposes the following sub-categorization (24):

First half of the language formation periods:

- Stage 1: Age 0-2
- Stage 2: Age 2-4
- Stage 3: Age 5-6
- Stage 4: Age 7-8

Second half of the language formation period:

- Stage 5: Age 9-13

Nakajima’s categorization takes into account a child’s language experiences with adults at home and peers at schools. In Stages 1 and 2, most of a child’s language input is provided by parents or other caretakers. In Stage 3, language is acquired through interaction both with peers and from adults. Stage 4 takes place during the first half of the child’s elementary school life, and friends at school are important source of input. Stage 5 occurs during the second half of the elementary and middle school.

A curriculum that takes into account heterogeneity of development in all domains, and the stages of language development, is likely to address the challenges facing JHS instruction, such as a lack of motivation among many JHL speakers to study at Saturday schools and the need to move beyond a focus on linguistic forms.

**Pedagogical Theories and Approaches**

This section, which discusses pedagogical theories and approaches useful to curriculum design, is informed by heterogeneity in cognitive, social and emotional development in young children, as well as language development in JHL children.

In developing pedagogical theories for teaching young JHL learners, I apply Valdés’ approach, which suggests drawing from theories and practices from first (L1) and second language (L2) pedagogy (Valdés 2001), to which I add theories and practices from early childhood and elementary education. This section discusses three main topics related to pedagogical theories and research and their role in promoting learning: 1) integrated instruction; 2) developmentally appropriate practice with subsections: a learner-centered
approach, multiage instruction, a standards-based approach, an inquiry-based approach, a hands-on and activity-based approach, and an interactive approach; and 3) assessment.

**Integrated Instruction**

This section discusses two types of “integrated instruction”: of content and language in the fields of L2 and FL education, and of curriculum in early and elementary education. While both fields are discussed independently, they are considered interrelated in the construction of theories and practices for JHL education.

**Integration of Content and Language**

Integrated instruction aims to teach both a language and school subject content taught in that language. Support for integrated language and content is informed by FL education and L2 education, particularly for students of limited English proficiency (Spanos 1989). There are six models of integrated instruction based on the various combinations of content and language integration: Total immersion, partial immersion, sheltered courses, adjunct courses, theme-based instruction, and language classes with frequent use of content for language practice (Met 1999: 144). Met describes these six models as existing on a continuum: the primary goal in the content-driven model is student mastery of content, whereas the primary goal of the language-driven model is mastery of the language with frequent use of content.

The traditional curriculum used at JHL schools, however, is based on a model that focuses on discrete language skills and does not aim towards the development of cognitive academic language ability. Cognitive language ability includes the ability to explain and discuss academic subjects as well as the ability to make coherent utterances on a discourse level. Consequently, as Nakajima (1998) points out, at JHL schools a child’s bilingual range in academic content areas stays extremely limited. The models particularly appropriate to JHL education are content-driven models such as L2 education for students of limited English proficiency (LEP) and the immersion model.

Studies report the positive effects of integrated instruction on students’ language learning. Garcia (1991) examined and synthesized the results of the existing descriptive studies on effective instructional practices for language minority students from pre-kindergarten to grade 12. She identified the following elements as necessary to academic achievement of minority students: high levels of communication, integrated and thematic curriculum, collaborative learning, systematic progression of literacy development in a target language, teachers with high levels of commitment to their students’ success, strong support from principals, and parental support and involvement. According to Thomas and Collier (1995), effective K-12 programs are characterized by language education through complex content, the practice of problem solving, and discovery learning in highly interactive classroom activities. They found ineffective the traditional approach in which discrete units of language were taught in a structured and sequenced curriculum with the learner treated as a passive recipient of knowledge. Kessler & Quinn (1987) and
Hampton and Rodriguez (2001) found that an inquiry-based hands-on approach was effective.

The immersion approach is known for its effectiveness in teaching a foreign language to young learners. It is used when a goal is developing proficiency in both the primary and secondary languages while ensuring content mastery of the subject matter. Snow (1990), based on survey responses from 58 experienced teachers in immersion programs, summarizes their most frequently utilized core instructional strategies. She concludes that immersion teachers use language and instructional techniques and strategies, such as body language, redundancy and repetition, and vocabulary development, to ensure acquisition of language and content.

The immersion model and its methodology provide valuable theoretical and practical information to the field of young JHL learner education. Yet researchers in this field add a cautionary note: Lapkin, Swain, and Shapson (1990) found that despite overall development of language skills by students in French immersion programs, their acquisition of grammar was weaker than native speakers’. Cohen (1998) found that immersion students had difficulties performing complex cognitive operations using the target language. Swain (1996) suggests that teachers incorporate into classroom work activities with a focus on form.

Research shows positive outcomes of pedagogical interventions for these problems. Harley (1998) found that form-focused instruction improved French immersion second graders’ correct use of grammatical gender. Cohen and Gomez’s (2003) study shows that strategy training given to 5th graders at Spanish immersion elementary school yielded positive outcomes in oral and written academic language. In addition, Solomom and Rhodes (1995) found that the academic language that students were supposed to use varied by academic task. Liang (2002) found functional variation between the students’ primary and secondary academic language use. These findings indicate that instruction needs to provide students with opportunities to perform varied academic tasks and to strengthen their functional use of academic registers.

Integrated Curriculum

Integrated curriculum in early childhood and elementary education integrates all areas of development across physical, emotional, social and cognitive domains. This approach was developed as a result of criticism of traditional curriculum, which narrowly centers on teaching basic academic skills and “touches on topics briefly, then goes on to the next rushed and unconnected subject, always with the assumption that, if a topic has been covered, it has been learned” (Krogh 1997: 44). By contrast, integration of curriculum establishes continuity in what children learn in different subject areas (Chard 1998). Research and theory support that young children learn best through a curriculum that is integrated (Seefeld 1997).
Integrated curriculum design starts with selecting areas of children’s interest, known as themes. Once a theme is selected, instructional goals across multiple disciplines are set up. The goals match the child’s development and are applied to the relevant subject matter, and then instructional activities to achieve the goals are designed. For example, in Krogh’s design, “animal” is selected as a theme and goals such as “count, classify”, “habitat observation”, “collaborating, sharing”, “making clay animals”, “browsing books”, and “sing songs” are set up and assigned to the disciplines such as math, science, social studies, art, language, and music (Krogh 1997: 45). Hart, Burts, and Charlesworth, (1997) present detailed descriptions of curriculum integration in mathematics, science, music, physical education, social studies, visual arts and literacy learning, accompanied by rationales from theories and research. Krogh (1997) points out that integrated curricula are commonly used in preschools, but that they are often abandoned in primary grades. She argues that integrated curricula are effective both for younger and older children.

**Developmentally Appropriate Practice**

Developmentally appropriate practice is defined as educational practice that takes into account differences in age, individual growth patterns, and cultural orientations (Krogh 1997). Kinsey (2001) reports that common elements of developmentally appropriate practice are cooperative group work, integrated curriculum and interaction among peers.

Many child development and early childhood educators have expressed concern about the increasing prominence given to formalized instruction for young children. For example, Katz and Chard (1997) criticize this type of instruction for its emphasis on factual knowledge at the expense of procedural knowledge (i.e., the performance of various procedures such as how to observe the brightness of sunshine, precipitation, wind and temperature to learn about weather). They suggest that an appropriate curriculum first strengthens children’s procedural knowledge and then introduces them to abstract representation directly related to the procedure.

Based on their synthesis of research, Hart, Burts, and Charlesworth (1997) conclude that the evidence appears to favor developmentally appropriate practice, especially in the affective domain. Their subjects, kindergarten and post-kindergarten pupils, exhibited less stress-related behavior and distractibility, more prosocial and conforming behavior, and higher motivation than their counterparts in a traditional program without developmentally appropriate instruction.

This section describes six approaches to developmentally appropriate practice. The learner-centered approach, multiage instruction, and the standards-based approach are relevant to curriculum decisions in general and guide teachers’ strategy in planning what to teach and in what sequence. The other approaches (inquiry-based, hands-on and activity-based, and the interactive approaches), are focused on designing instructional activities.
Learner-centered Approaches

Due to heterogeneous development emotionally, linguistically, and in cognitive and social skills, educational needs of JHL children vary tremendously. Researchers and heritage language educators argue that learner-centered instruction is an element of successful practice, as it enables heritage language instruction to be relevant to the students (Draper and Hicks 2000; Giacone 2000; Miller 2000).

Katz and Chard (1997: 46-47) see a paradox in traditional teacher-centered instruction with a homogeneous approach. The ultimate goal of education, whether it is teacher-centered or learner-centered, is the homogenous, development of linguistic, cognitive, social and emotional skills. The traditional teacher-centered instruction with a uniformly prescribed curriculum, however, yields heterogeneous outcomes, and the approach therefore works against the homogeneous goals. Katz and Chard argue that a learner-centered curriculum, by contrast, is organized based on heterogeneity, and provides varied instructional methods and activities, so that outcomes are homogeneous. Citing research on the long-term effects of early childhood curricula, Katz and Chard also advocate that “the curriculum should provide interaction, active rather than passive activities, and ample opportunity to initiate and be engaged in interesting activities” (italic emphasis added) (Katz and Chard 1997: 47). Children need an opportunity to develop new skills and knowledge based on what they already have learned.

Multiage Instructional Approach

The multiage instructional approach is also known as multilevel or non-graded instruction. Multiage classes include children of different ages who work with the same teacher(s) for several years. The age difference between the youngest and oldest students is often three or more years. Multiage instruction does not segregate students by grade, and student progress is assessed according to his/her development rather than against time. It is important to note that multiage instruction differs from multi-grade instruction. Multi-grade instruction consists of two or three grades housed in the same classroom, but taught separately (Lloyd 1999), and is practiced for administrative or economic reasons such as uneven small enrollments or an insufficient number of teachers or facilities. Multiage instruction, however, is the result of educational preference. Grouping children by age does not reflect an understanding of the heterogeneous character of child development. Children achieve their grade equivalent goals at various times, and some of them need longer than the time given, which can result in grade retention, placing stress on children and families as well as teachers. JHL schools with single grade curricula experience these same difficulties (Douglas and Kataoka 2004).

According to studies of multiage instruction, the degree of effectiveness varies, but the weight of evidence appears to favor the approach for the benefits it yields in student’s academic achievement and the affective domain (pro-social behaviors, better attendance, and less stress-related behaviors) (Gutierrez and Slavin 1992; Kelly-Vance, Caster, and Ruane 2000; Lloyd 1999; Nye et al. 1995). The multiage classroom also provides
students with ample opportunities to learn from more capable peers, which enables them to expand their Zone of Proximal Development, as defined by Vygotsky (Cole 1978) as the distance between the actual developmental level and the level of potential development.

**A Standards-based Approach for Continuing Learning and Development**

Curricula created for multiage instruction requires the use of continuous progress indicators based on children’s development in linguistic, cognitive, social and affective domain, enabling teachers to provide children with instruction suited to their level. Currently, however, no existing progress indicators are available for young JHL learners’ education. Valdés (2001) suggests basing heritage language instruction on the Standards for Foreign Language Learning (1999) which would enable heritage speakers and teachers to conceptualize the areas requiring further development.

Giacone (2000), citing from New York State Integrated Learning Standards (1997), emphasizes the importance of the integration of language acquisition standards and language arts standards, which focus on communication skills, thinking processes, work habits and attitudes such as collaboration, cooperation, and awareness of diverse cultures. Hart, Burts, and Charlesworth (1997) also established the connection between developmentally appropriate practice and the standards for young learners. They present a model of curriculum design in various content areas, which include math, science, music, physical education, social studies, visual arts and literacy learning.

The development of a learner-centered integrated curriculum for heritage learners that is based on a goal of continuing progress requires the integration of language standards and subject matter standards. However, there is at present insufficient empirical data on heritage language acquisition to form a foundation for language standards. As Lynch (2003) argues, research on heritage language acquisition is still in order.

**Inquiry-based Approach**

According to Joyce and Weil (1986), inquiry training was developed by Richard Suchman to teach scientific process skills and strategies for creative inquiry as explicit curriculum goals. Implicit instructional goals for the inquiry-based approach are the spirit of creativity, independence in learning, tolerance of ambiguity, and an understanding of the tentative nature of knowledge (Joyce and Weil 1986: 68). Inquiry training fosters higher order thinking skills, including scientific process skills such as formulating and testing hypothesis and explanations, inferring, and reflecting. The approach consists of the following five phases (Joyce and Weil 1986: 61):

- **Phase one:** Confrontation with the problem (puzzling situation).
- **Phase two:** Data gathering-verification
- **Phase three:** Data gathering-experimentation
- **Phase four:** Formulating an explanation<
• Phase five: Analysis of the inquiry process (reflection to improve the inquiry process)

Joyce and Weil, summarizing other studies, state that the inquiry-based approach results in an improved understanding of science, productivity in creative thinking, and the acquisition of skills for obtaining and analyzing information.

Based on research on teaching science in English to bilingual and ESL children, Kessler and Quinn (1987: 79) conclude that “both science and language can be developed at the same time when conditions for effective science inquiry and second language acquisition are met through the classroom structure and management”. Hampton and Rodriguez (2001) studied the effectiveness of this approach on Spanish-English bilingual elementary school children. They found that teaching new science concepts in both languages resulted in an increase in the pupils’ language skills in each language. The attitude survey in their study showed that the children’s most enjoyable academic subject was science. Although the approach was originally developed for teaching science, the five-phase procedures can be used for all subjects as long as topics can be formulated as puzzling situations (Joyce and Weil 1986).

**Hands-on and Activity-based Approach**

This approach is an integral part of the inquiry-based approach. Kessler and Quinn (1987) argue that content becomes comprehensible by interaction with others through hands-on activities, and that a preference for a textbook-based approach over hands-on investigation constrains opportunities to understand content. Cummins (1992), in his framework of language proficiency, argues that language minority students’ failure to develop high levels of L2 academic skills is due to instruction carried out in “context-reduced” communication such as the type practiced in textbook-based instruction. Cummins further claims that the context-embeddedness of L2 input makes that input comprehensible and results in greater development of L2 skills (Cummins 1992: 21).

The hands-on and activity-based approach is supported by child development theory. As discussed earlier, K-6 children are on a continuum of cognitive development between the end of Piaget’s preoperational period and the concrete operational period. At these stages, concrete learning is essential to children’s successful development and learning. As cited above, Krogh (1997) emphasizes the importance of concrete objects to children as they learn to reason. Likewise, Donaldson (1978, cited in Cummins 1992) affirms that children are able to manifest much higher levels of cognitive performance when the task is presented in a concrete context.

**Interactive Approach**

The interactive approach draws on recent research demonstrating that interaction in a learning environment is essential for language acquisition and the cognitive development of young learners. In their meta-analysis of the studies of effective instructional practices
for bilingual minority children, Garcia (1991) and Thomas and Collier (1995) found that interaction among children and highly interactive classroom activities were common successful variables. Based on a thorough analysis of research findings, the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence includes interaction as one of the five principles in the Standards for Effective Teaching and Learning (Echevarria 1998). The Standards aim for language development by generating instructional conversation between a teacher and learners in an academic context, rather than one-way directions from a teacher. The instructional conversation allows for sensitive contextualization, as well as precise, stimulating cognitive challenge.

Kinsey’s (2001) research synthesis finds that peer interaction is a common element of developmentally appropriate practice resulting in academic achievement. Similarly, Katz and Chard (1997: 47) argue that young children’s intellectual and social development is likely to be served best by opportunities to interact with adults, their peers, the environment and a variety of materials. Katz and Chard advocate that the content of interaction should progress from children’s first-hand experiences and real environment during the early years to indirect experiences and environments of others in the later years, consistent with Piaget’s developmental theory.

Assessment

Assessment methods must reflect the principles on which a theoretical framework for a curriculum is based. Gutierrez and Slavin (1992: 337) list the elements of ideal assessment, adapted by Pavan (1972) from Goodlad and Anderson (1963, 1987). Although the list was originally developed for the research on multiage instruction, its principles can serve as a framework to construct assessment instruments in young JHL learner education.

- Children are evaluated in terms of their own achievements and potential, not by comparison to group norms. Expectations differ for different children.
- Evaluation is done for diagnostic purposes and results in the formulation of new education objectives.
- Evaluation must be continuous and comprehensive.
- A child strives mainly to improve his or her performance and develop potential rather than to compete with others.
- Teachers accept that children’s growth patterns are irregular and occur in different areas at different times.
- Individual pupil progress forms are used to record learning tasks completed, deficiencies that need to be addressed, and other data to suggest future learning experiences.
- Evaluation and reporting will consider all areas of a child’s development: aesthetic, physical, intellectual, emotional, and social.

The inadequacies of the traditional tests led to an assessment reform in early 1990s, in which the focus of assessment shifted from product-based assessments that evaluate what
children know to performance-based assessments that measure what they can do. Short (1993), stressing that language and content should be assessed separately, proposes an assessment matrix measuring eight skills: problem solving, content-area skills, concept comprehension, language use, communication skills, individual behavior, group behavior, and attitude. Short proposes instruments to measure these skills, including skill and concept check lists, reading and writing inventories, anecdotal record, teacher observation, student self evaluation, portfolios, task-based performance, written essays, reports, oral reports, and student interviews.

Short’s proposed assessment is intended for LEP children, who need to develop academic language proficiency in a short period of time. Assessment instruments for young heritage learners need to measure academic language and basic communication skills. The varied JHL environment of these children affects the development of basic communication skills and academic language skills.

An example of an instrument that could be used with the proposed curriculum is the Oral Proficiency Assessment for Bilingual Children (OBC) developed by the Canadian Association for Japanese Language Education (2000). The OBC proposes three dimensions for assessment: basic language skills with accuracy as a component, interpersonal skills with contextual support, and cognitive language ability without contextual support that requires high-level cognitive ability including narration. The OBC measures fluency and accuracy, in both basic interpersonal communication skills and academic language abilities. The test takes ten minutes to administer.

**Curriculum Design**

This section presents a process of curriculum design for K-8 JHL learners, integrating the theories and approaches discussed in the previous section. The curriculum adopts a multiage approach; K-8 JHL learners are placed in different levels, according to their stage of child development, discussed in the previous section. One level consists of two or three age groups. The number of levels in a program may vary based on many factors, including the range of learners’ language proficiency and the number of pupils enrolled.

The process of curriculum development is shown in Figure 1. The boxes linked by arrows indicate five steps, which are linked to relevant theories and approaches. The design process starts with an informal assessment of the learners’ interest, content knowledge and language proficiency (Step 1). Instruction starts from what the learners are interested in, know and can do in relation to what needs to be taught (learner-centered approach). The first stage is particularly important in a JHL curriculum. Unlike FL learning, in which learners’ language development proceeds more or less uniformly from simple to complex, JHL children come to school with a varied bilingual range. A JHL student may only understand or be able to speak on familiar topics, or may have various degrees of literacy (Nakajima 1998: 9-10) The first step of curriculum development is the construction of a learner profile through an assessment process, such as OBC, and recorded as a reference for use throughout the course.
Based on the information collected during Step 1, possible themes, topics for the given theme, and their contents are selected. Then relevant academic subject matter and their instructional activities are chosen at Step 2. Effective strategies of theme and topic selection is discussed both in education for L1 children (Bingham et al. 1995; Chard 1998) and in foreign language education (Curtain and Dahlberg 2004; Graves 2000). A commonly advocated approach for theme and topic selection is the creation of an idea web, a figure that contains topic and sub-topics or key words. Curtain and Dahlberg (2004) state that a web “allows the planner to extend the theme in many directions and to flesh out the topic with meaningful categories and subcategories” (148).

Chard recommends incorporating learners’ ideas into the web. Collaborative web construction provides another opportunity to assess learners’ content knowledge and language proficiency. Figure 2 shows an example of a web to select possible topics for upper elementary level. The web starts a concept “cycle” for which children contribute their ideas (marked by thick lines). During this activity, a teacher can obtain each child’s background knowledge about a concept “cycle”. Starting from the children’s knowledge, potential topics (showed in boxes in Figure 2 in Appendix 2) are generated for academic subjects and they are taught in an integrated way, with science and math together, or ecology and biology together, for example. The content of the selected topic should be cognitively complex, an attribute of an effective practice both for language development (Thomas and Collier 1995) and for the development of higher-order cognitive skills and the increase of academic procedural and factual knowledge.

Step 3 is to select and arrange the order of implementation of the topics and establish learning objectives, referring to language learning standards and language arts standards for continuing development. Separate learning objectives for various students may be required, depending on the variation found in language ability and content knowledge. Common goals for all levels of JHL curriculum are to expand learners’ language skills developed at home, a goal that does not exist in FL curricula, and strengthen academic language ability, which Nakajima (1998) found was difficult to develop with existing JHL curricula.

At Step 4, instructional materials are collected and teaching activities with hands-on experiences are designed for all topics, using an inquiry-based approach that fosters higher-order thinking skills. In Step 4, abstract concepts of the academic subject matter are introduced through hands-on experiences, consistent with Cummins’ theory of “context embedded” instruction (1992) and Krogh’s (1997) recognition of the importance of concrete objects to learning.

Parental assistance is included as a part of JHL instruction. Native speaker parents are valuable sources of input; in addition, parental involvement is a partial remedy for the limited instructional time at JHL schools. Parents become reading and conversation partners, interviewees for their children’s school survey projects, and provide assistance with homework. Part of the curriculum is devoted to guiding parents in helping their
children’s learning at home, and in this sense JHL education is parental education as well (Nakajima 1998).

Step 5 consists of a teaching phase with a concurrent assessment. Alternative assessment instruments suggested by Short (1993), including the OBC are used to assess students progress. If necessary, instructional objectives are adjusted, reestablished or repeated, following the design cycle from Steps 3, 4 and 5. This process is repeated whenever new themes and topics are introduced.
Summary

The goal of the curriculum design proposed in this paper is the development of oral language skills learned at home and of academic language ability, including literacy skills. A challenge for a JHL curriculum planner is the heterogeneous language proficiency of HL speakers, which requires multilevel planning. The proposed model can be utilized at hoshuukoo that consider offering a separate track for children who do not need preparation for school attendance in Japan. The model also serves as a reference for teachers from Japan to develop their knowledge of JHL teaching methodology, which differs from teaching Japanese as a mother tongue. Although the curriculum from Japan is not appropriate for JHL speakers, the FL approach adopted by many JHL schools does not meet JHL children’s needs either. As discussed in the first section, JHL schools have shifted their educational goals from mother tongue education to FL education due to an increase of FL learners. However, according to Douglas, Kataoka and Kishimoto’s study (2003), JHL schools have a fairly large number of children from a “new” first generation immigrant families or inter-racial families (an average of 89% of the learner population are JHL learners, although the number is varied among the schools). For schools with large numbers of JHL children this JHL model is a useful resource.

The new standards for foreign language education in higher education has the goal of training students to develop their language proficiency to superior or near-native levels according to ACTFL Oral Proficiency Guidelines (Brecht 2003). Heritage language speakers possess better potential than foreign language learners in reaching these levels, provided that they have developed their language proficiency before entering college. However, HL schools, especially those for less commonly taught languages, often have been unable to develop appropriate curricula that can result in significant proficiency gains. The model proposed in this paper is a step towards developing curricula that will meet the needs of currently enrolled students, help them to live up to their potential, and motivate them to continue their studies. The model could be adaptable for use in other HL schools for languages other than Japanese.

Works Cited


Draper, Jamie B., and June H. Hicks. “Where We’ve Been: What We’ve Learned.” Webb and Miller 15-35.


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Appendix: Figures 1 and 2

Figure 1. Process of curriculum design

**Step 1:** Informal assessment of students’ interest, content knowledge and language ability

**Step 2:** Link generated idea to possible academic subjects and contents

**Step 3:** Establish instructional objectives, referring to language and content standards.

Adjust or re-establish objectives for individual students.

**Step 4:** Collect instructional materials. Develop instructional activities.

**Step 5:** Instruction & concurrent formative assessment and summative assessments

Learner centered approach

Integrated approach

Standard-based approach for continuing progress

Inquiry-based approach, hands-on and activity-based instruction

Involvement of native speaker parent(s)

Alternative assessments
Figure 2. Example of a topic web “Cycle”

Biology: observe how plants grow

Seeds->plants

Science: how clouds are formed

Rain->water->clouds

Math: make graphs of daily temperature

Science: weather, temperature

Ecology: acid rain

Science: measurement of PH

Animal’s feces-> fertilizer for

vegetable-> animals’ food

CO₂ and O₂ between plants and human

Biology: nutrition, digestion

Biology: photo synthesis, Human body